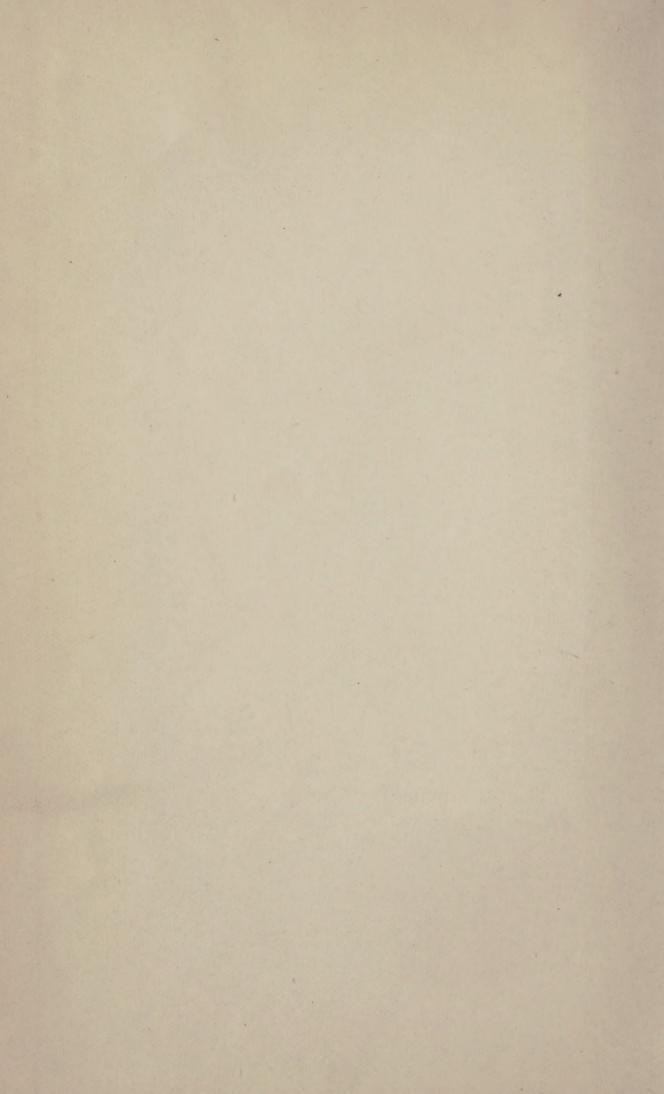


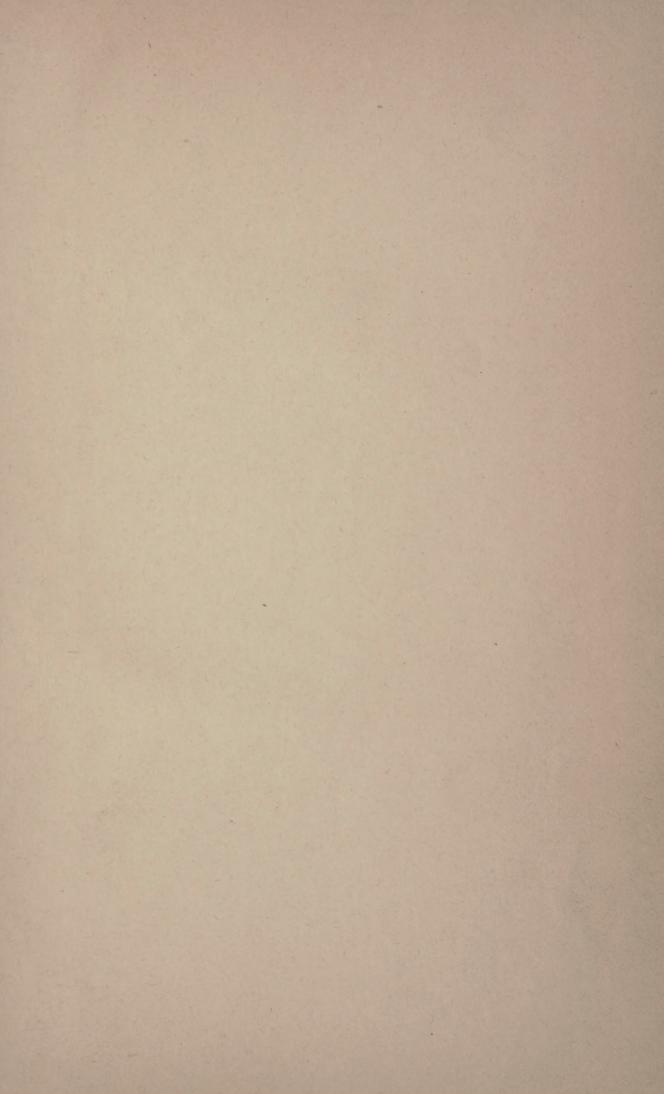


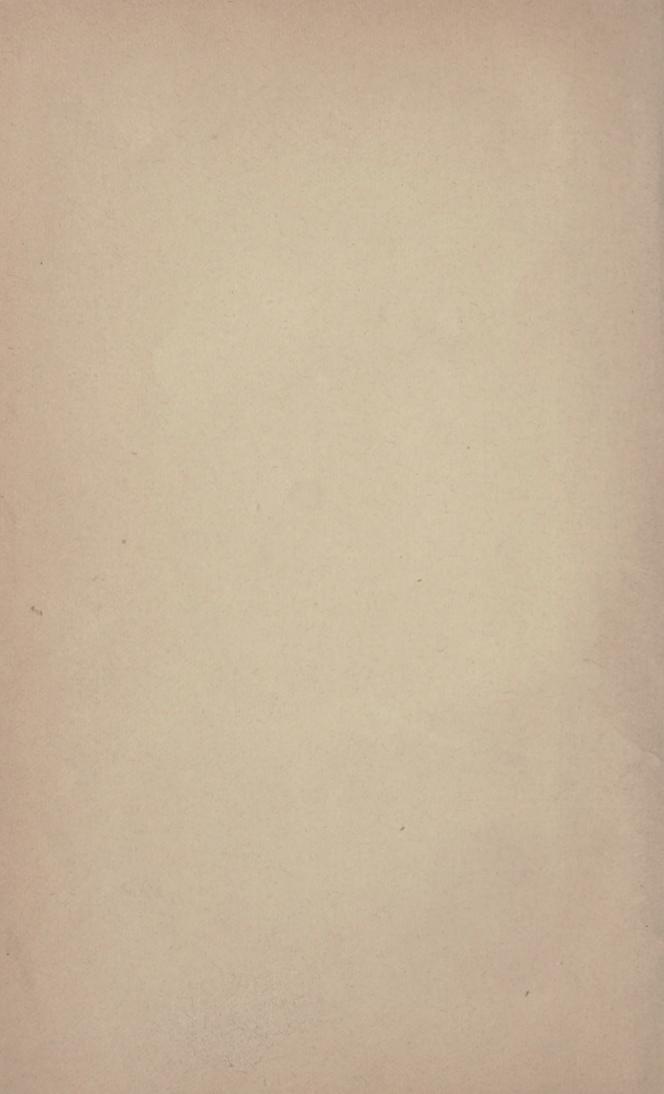
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## THE NEW MOON

BY

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C. E. RAIMOND prend of Robins, Elizabeth



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## THE NEW MOON.

"At digte, det er at holde Dommedag over sig selv."

STANDING as I do on the threshold of the unknown—for it cannot be many months, perhaps not many weeks, before, as the saying goes, I am "called to my account"—I ask myself what conceivable Intelligence, human or divine, could possibly sum up that account so as to strike a clear and definite balance, either on the good or on the evil side.

The doctrine of future rewards and punishments, I confess, seems to me at least as dubious from the ethical as from the historic or the scientific point of view. Putting aside the

question of responsibility, admitting for the nonce the paradox of free-will, I cannot but doubt whether God Himself can unravel the infinite tangle of human motives, and discriminate the proportions of good and evil in a given action, or in the series of actions which we call a life.

I believe, indeed, that the greater the intelligence the more clearly must it recognize how inadequate and inapplicable are such clumsy terms as "good" and "evil." They are useful rough-and-ready watchwords for the moral police of society; but when we probe beneath the surface of things, they soon cease to have a meaning. The Great Tribunal, I am ready to believe, would own itself incompetent in many a case which an Old Bailey judge, or a newspaper moralist, would decide and dismiss with summary dogmatism; just as the trained jurist or psychologist will confess himself baffled by many a problem for which the man in the

How often do we hear some one say with an air of surprise, "I don't altogether understand that man—he is something of an enigma to me!" As though we quite understood anybody! As though we quite understood ourselves! Nothing is stranger in all the strange world than our child-like readiness to pin labels on the backs of our fellows, making known to all men by these presents that our neighbour is a saint or a scoundrel—nothing less and nothing more.

Here, then, on the threshold of the unknown, waiting for the little postern to open, I look back over the windings of the path that has led me hither. I summon my own soul to judgment, and my soul answers to the call. But when I ask if it be "Guilty" or "Not guilty," it demurs to the formula. It pleads "Not guilty," but it adds "Not innocent." It is fit neither for Heaven nor for Hell, and it

knows not how Purgatory can purge it or alter the unalterable past. Judge and prisoner in one, I while away the days that are left me in summing up my own case. I may not—probably I shall not—clear my way to a definite self-judgment. When I come to think of it, indeed, it is only inveterate hypocrisy that makes me affect any wish to do so. My real desire is simply to live over again the hours—they were none too many—of the rarest friend-ship that ever fell to the lot of man.

As I write the superlative, I smile. How many another has said the same before me? How many another, after I go hence, will keep the fair illusion travelling down the ages? Yet, as I look back, thinking of the men and women I have known, the world seems bare of perfect friendship, except my friend's for me. Is it only that I understand my fellows as little as they have understood me? Have all, or even many, of our commonplace acquaintances an

illuminated border to the prim dull text of their Book of Life—a border scrupulously covered up when stranger eyes are peering—pictures in scarlet and purple and gold of things incredible and true?

One thing at least is no illusion: there has been one perfect friendship under the sun. It may be an illusion to fancy it unique, but that it was "perfect" I know as surely as I know that I must die. It was embittered by no unkind word, flawed by no ungenerous thought; and now Time itself is powerless to mar or alter it, for it has passed beyond the reach of change. For that, too, I have come to thank "whatever gods there be."

But here is the point that sometimes tortures me. My friend had but one glimpse into the very depths of my soul; I read in her eyes a momentary horror of what she found there; and it was almost the last thing I ever saw in her face. Would she have understood if she had had time to think and realise? I tell my-self she would; nay, I know that she did. It is only the madman in me—the madman who every now and then wantons in the sanest of us—that denies or even doubts it.

Would others understand? It matters nothing, but I sometimes wonder. We are apt to imagine that the strange adventures of our souls are peculiar to ourselves, unknown, incomprehensible to our neighbours; but is that not merely because our neighbours' souls are as dark to us as ours are to them?

From time to time, by the quick lightning of disaster, we may get hurried glimpses into the depths of our own nature, but we draw back shuddering and shamed, or else elated, as the case may be, thinking we have seen and felt that which no other man in all his philosophy has dreamt of. We have the hero in us side by side with the slave. The martyr and the poet, on this little battlefield within, wage lifelong

warfare on the braggart and the cheat—but it cannot be the same with our neighbours. They live as many leagues aloof from heroism as from crime. But, after all, I find it hard to remember, and well-nigh impossible to realise, that my own outward life must have seemed to my acquaintances every whit as dull and commonplace as theirs appeared to me.

They knew no more of me than that I was a prosperous physician, for whom (after the first year or two of married life) one bit of fortune trod upon the other's heels, so fast they followed; that I inherited large means at the age of twenty-five, and that my practice was established at a time when most men of my age were laboriously building up theirs. I understand that I have been called unsociable; but even that charge is palliated, if not converted into a virtue, by the legend current of my devotion to my delicate and childless wife. The opinion was hazarded long ago that I had made

a hasty and too early marriage. But that was when I was twenty-one and my wife twenty. We outlived the reproach.

IT was on a certain Good Friday morning, about seven years ago, that I sat in my consulting-room after breakfast, as usual dictating letters to my secretary. Mrs. Preston was a silent, capable person, who had formerly been a patient of mine. I had found, on her recovery from a long and tedious illness, that she was impoverished and without friends. She had before her marriage been secretary to a friend of mine, and when her good-for-nothing husband died, she began to look about for employment. She came to us at the seaside in the days of her convalescence, because my wife was touched by her misfortunes, and pleased for the moment to be playing Lady Bountiful. But Mrs. Preston's unbending spirit was ill adapted to the part of grateful beneficiary, and she would not stay with us long. Shortly after her somewhat abrupt departure, I was obliged to discharge my secretary. I wrote at once to Mrs. Preston offering her the post. For several years now she had not only taken charge of my correspondence, but of the housekeeping as well. My wife's failing health made some such arrangement necessary, and it turned out admirably for all concerned.

Perhaps I should say for my wife and me. What Mrs. Preston thought or felt, no one had an opportunity of judging. She was one of the inarticulate ones, but she did me excellent service. She was devoted to my wife, who often treated her capriciously; and she effaced herself so completely that one came to reckon her among the blind forces of nature, always to be counted on—ever operating for our good, but not sentient and non-human.

On this morning in question, Millicent-my

wife—had sent down in rapid succession two messages to the effect that she "must see me at once."

I found her on the sofa in her pretty morning-room, wearing one of those loose pale-coloured gowns she so affected, her thin light hair done with elaborate care, and on her still childish face that worn, petulant look that was not so much ill-temper as mild reproach.

"Why didn't you come the first time, you bad boy?" she said. "You take care of everybody's health but Mimi's. I've got such a dreadful headache."

"You read too much," I said, looking at the fat new volume in her lap, with the tortoise-shell paper-knife sticking out of it. "And that position, as I've often told you, strains the optic nerve more than—"

"Nonsense! I had my headache before I began to read."

"Then you shouldn't have opened a book

till it was gone. You would probably have been better by this time."

"I wonder if you're as unsympathetic with all the poor wretches who come here to see you as you are with me. You always make out it's my fault when I'm not well."

I pulled out my watch.

"Jiffy!" she cried suddenly, sitting up, "you mustn't go yet."

I had opened the door. I could hear voices down in the hall. My man was admitting a patient who had come before regular hours.

"Jiffy! Jiffy!" my wife repeated shrilly. I shut the door suddenly, conscious as I often was, in spite of long custom, of my invincible shrinking in these later years from having the old pet name overheard. An unshared sense of the ludicrous may be a serious factor in the matrimonial problem.

"I want you to come to vespers with Mimi this evening," my wife was saying.

- "Vespers to-day?"
- "Yes; it's Good Friday, and this morning I couldn't—"
- "I don't think you're wise to go and sit in a cold, damp church, if you—"
- "Oh, I'll be better by then. Besides, it ought to do me good to go to church," she said vaguely. "You'll come, Jiffy dear?"
- "No; I have several visits to pay this afternoon."
- "They won't keep you later than half-past four."
- "Sure to. I have to go all the way from Hampstead to Hans Place."
- "Bother! something's always wrong on Friday. Who's ill in Hans Place? Not any of the Dentons?"
- "No; I don't remember the name." I glanced at the letter I held in my hand.

My wife took up the envelope I dropped on the sofa.

"What irritating writing!" she observed, holding it off and regarding it suspiciously. "That *Dr. Geoffrey Monroe* looks as if it was written with a needle."

I was accustomed to my wife's little views on the characteristics of handwriting, and had ceased to argue the matter.

"Whose writing is this?" she said.

I looked down on the envelope. "I don't know."

- "Isn't it horrid, Jiffy?"
- "Well-no. I think it's rather good."
- "Rather good?"
- "Yes; no nonsense about it, and readable enough."
- "Do you mean to say you'd trust a person who wrote like that?"
  - "I might."
- "Well, I wouldn't. That's the writing of a selfish, cold-blooded, calculating character."

  She looked a little annoyed at my laughter.

"Oh, very well, if you won't believe I can read handwriting—!"

"My dear, you're like the rest of us," I said, folding up the letter. "You can read it if it's plain enough."

"Well, this is plain enough in all conscience. Can't you see how stingy he is? He grudges finishing his final e's, and his y's haven't any loop, nothing but a straight downstroke. And look at the niggardly little t in St., with its prim cross exactly in the middle. Oh, he's a horrid, parsimonious, domineering creature, you may depend on it. Who is it?"

"I don't know." I handed her the letter.

My wife sat up and read eagerly:

"'Mrs. Jasper Lance presents her'—why, Aunt Caroline used to know a Mrs. Jasper Lance—must be the same, I should think—'presents her compliments to Dr. Monroe, and will feel greatly obliged if he will call upon her in the course of the afternoon. Mrs. Lance

makes this request at the suggestion of her medical attendant, Dr. Seton Smith, who has been very suddenly called out of town.' What a nuisance! Shall you have to look after Seton Smith's patients again, in addition to all your own?"

"Oh no. Ballard takes all but the most important cases. I had a telegram from Smith yesterday."

"Well, I think it's a shame. You have too much to do already." She studied the note from Hans Place. "Mrs. Jasper Lance must be a horrid old woman from Aunt Caroline's account—but she didn't write this."

"Why not?" I said, taking the offending letter.

"Oh, that's young writing—young and not an invalid's—and a person I wouldn't have for my secretary."

"Very well, we'll agree to look upon the writer as a suspicious character." I opened the

door. "Get Mrs. Preston or Maria Baynton to go to church with you if you must go, but you'd much better have a brisk walk before tea and then come home."

"You know very well I'm not strong enough for brisk walks."

"Then don't go out at all. Or else drive."

"And live like a Hottentot and never go to church at all, I suppose!"

I closed the door behind me and ran downstairs. I thought she called "Jiffy!" after me, but fearing may have been father to hearing.

WHEN I went into Mrs. Lance's room that afternoon, I found, bending over the sick woman, a girl of about twenty, who looked up on my entrance, and came forward with quiet self-possession.

"We are very grateful to you for coming," she said. "My grandmother had an unusually

bad night." I bowed, and turned to the sick-bed.

But I had a distinct impression of the tall, well-carried figure in its close-fitting gown, the small head, a little overweighted, perhaps, with its masses of brown hair, and the general air of strength and capacity, which it was hard at first to reconcile with the beautiful young face and its look of innocence and inexperience.

"I have been under the care of Dr. Fournier of Paris, and Dr. Blokke of Vienna, and a dozen besides," Mrs. Lance was saying, as she regarded me with shrewd distrust. "I've gone everywhere and done everything—except get better."

I drew a chair to her bedside and sat down.

"Every doctor I consult," she went on resentfully, "tells me all the others were wrong, and he can cure me—and I always believe him." She pursed up her mouth with indescribable contempt.

Her granddaughter was leaving the room.

- "Don't go, Dorothy," Mrs. Lance said, with imperative peevishness.
- "Only for a few minutes, grandmamma," the girl replied calmly.
- "The bell is there," she said to me, indicating an old-fashioned tasselled rope that hung by the head of the bed. Then she closed the door softly behind her, and I did not see her again until I went downstairs. She was waiting in the hall.
- "Do you think my grandmother will die?" she said, speaking low.
- "She is very weak," I said, and I noticed how the girl's colour changed.
- "I understand," she nodded; but her voice shook.
- "Oh, I don't mean there is no hope. Not at all. We must just keep up her strength for a week or two, and try a new course of treatment." But the girl evidently saw that I was

doubtful if I could pull her through. I told her of the prescription I had left upstairs, and asked if there was a competent nurse available.

"There is only me," she said, "but I will do all you tell me."

I did not stop to inquire into the situation. It was late, and I left hurriedly, promising to come the next day.

My view of the case, as Mrs. Lance had prophesied, was at variance with that of my colleague. But my new plan of treatment gave her such relief that it was ultimately decided I should continue my constant and unremitting care of the case, even after Seton Smith's return.

It did not take me long to discover that Miss Lance was the moving spirit in that great and lonely house, and it was to her that I confided all special directions.

Mrs. Jasper Lance was difficult and crotchety. She never had been, and would not now be, nursed by "a stranger." Her own servants, she insisted, were quite competent— "and Dorothy wasn't a fool." As a natural result, much of the burden of the situation fell on her capable granddaughter.

After a few weeks, I found myself now and then timing my visit so that, after seeing my patient, I could be persuaded to have a cup of tea in the drawing-room with Miss Lance and her cousin, Mrs. Wallingford. This lady seemed to occupy an anomalous position in that extraordinary household. I never saw her in Mrs. Jasper Lance's presence, and once when I referred in passing to some remark of Mrs. Wallingford's, the calm-browed Dorothy frowned, and looked a reproof in my direction.

"Is that Wallingford woman here again?" said Mrs. Jasper Lance sharply.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Yes," said Dorothy.

"Humph! She must think I'm in a bad way this time. But you can tell her it's no use. I don't believe in death-bed sentimentality. If I meet her in the kingdom of Heaven, I shall very likely box her ears; so she'd better keep out of my way."

"She will not trouble you, grandmamma."

"She does trouble me! What is she hanging about my house for?"

There was a pause. I tore off the leaf I had been writing on, and drew the elastic band round my prescription tablet.

"She and Aunt Mary think it best that some one should be here with me while you're ill."

"Oh, they do, do they? They can't wait till I'm dead, before they arrange my affairs for me. You'll be kind enough to tell Amelia Wallingford—no, wait!" She rang the bell at the bedside.

"Dr. Monroe is going, grandmamma," said

Dorothy, seeing that I stood a little perplexed, and very remorseful for having brought on the storm.

"Good-morning—good-morning," said the irate old woman. "You and I will defeat the Wallingford and the whole crawling tribe, Dr. Monroe! I never felt better in my life. But come to-morrow—come to-morrow."

As I passed out of the room, a maid went hurriedly in. Dorothy remained with her grandmother.

The next day I learned the Wallingford had gone.

After a while, the little talk with Miss Lance in the drawing-room, before presenting myself to my patient, or before taking my leave, became as much a matter of course as the teas which Mrs. Wallingford had instituted. At first I would stand by the mantelpiece, instinctively avoiding the familiar "quite-at-home" aspect I must have presented in an arm-chair,

compelling myself to talk careful professional jargon, as if the beautiful Dorothy were a nurse in her novitiate, and I not waiting there simply and solely for that straight-in-the-eyes smile of hers that I knew would challenge and pursue me till I came again.

From house to house it followed me, from bedside to bedside; and when I closed my own door behind me, it was the one thing I could not have shut out had I tried. But I did not try. It was curious, perhaps, that, to a man of my somewhat stoical and altogether regular life, this new interest presented no conscious problem, no coming danger.

WHEN my wife questioned me as to how "that dreadful old woman in Hans Place" was coming on, I asked, a little sharply perhaps, what she knew about Mrs. Lance.

"Aunt Caroline met her in Switzerland years

ago, and used to tell us that of all the outrageous old vixens that ever—"

"I shouldn't think she was more than sixty now. How many years ago was she supposed to be old as well as outrageous?"

"Don't be such a hair-splitter, Geoffrey!"
My wife leaned on one elbow, and pulled the sofa-pillow into place. "It was ten years ago, I should think, that they were all at Lucerne, anyhow; and when a woman has grandchildren she's not usually called young."

"Oh, she had grandchildren?"

"Yes, a boy and a girl. The boy died. The girl lives with her, doesn't she?"

"Yes; I suppose it's the same."

"Must be. Have you seen her? There's only one. What's she like?"

"Oh, a tall, pleasant sort of girl."

"Yes, that must be Dorothy. I suppose she's getting on for thirty now."

"Nearer twenty, I should say."

"Oh, you think that because you're a man."

I went over to the mantelpiece to get a paper I had left there. I stood turning over the leaves.

- "Oh, I forgot to ask you—have you ever seen the secretary?" Millicent said.
  - "What secretary?"
- "The one who wrote the note asking you to go to Mrs. Lance."
  - "No, I've never seen a secretary."
- "I wonder if the granddaughter didn't write it?"
  - "Very likely."
- "Well, if she did, I'm glad I don't know her. Jiffy, you're exactly between Mimi and the fire."
  - "Oh, am I? I didn't notice." I sat down.
  - "What are you reading?"
  - "The Deutsche Medicinische Wochenschrift."
- "You know that doesn't convey anything to me. Tell me in English."

I translated the title of the particular article I was reading.

"The rugs are slipping down, Jiffy," she interrupted. "Come and—"

I went over and arranged them. She caught my hand and held it against her face.

"Nice and warm you are."

"And you're like ice. Put your hands under."

"No, I won't. It's horridly unbecoming to have a nasty grey rug up under your chin."

"Don't be foolish," I said. "Come, let me cover you up." I was conscious that she was looking pretty in her rather too delicate and waxen fashion, but I was used to that. "Come," I said, waiting to pull the rug up.

"No, not that horrid grey thing. Go upstairs and get my white cashmeres. You know—they're on the Italian chest."

I brought down a pile of fleecy shawls. She was sitting up arranging the lace at her throat when I came in.

- "How do you like my peignoir?" she said, looking down at the loose blue-silk gown she was wearing.
  - "Very nice. Something new?"
  - "Now did you ever see it before?"
  - "No, can't say I-"
  - "Yes, you have."
- "Have I seen this?" I tried to look interested. I was making a mental computation of how long it would be before I would be allowed to go back to the *Theorie der Heredität der Lungenschwindsucht*.
- "Look here." She turned the loose sleeve back and showed a white lining with a little blue flower in it. "Do you recognise that?"
  - "Yes; I think I do."
- "Well, I should hope so. I've worn it dozens of times. It's my forget-me-not gown turned wrong side out."
  - "Oh!" I said.
  - "Yes; I started to dress in a great hurry this

evening in the dusk, and, before I knew it, I was putting it on wrong side out."

"Oh well, it doesn't look badly." I began to spread out the shawls.

"But don't you understand? It's wrong side out—and it's Friday."

"Friday?"

"Yes. Horrid day, Friday. But it's such good luck to get a thing on wrong side out, I don't care if it is Friday, and I've started my new piece of embroidery. I thought I'd have to wait till to-morrow—" She talked on, and I went back to my magazine after I had covered her up.

"Jiffy!" I didn't answer. "Geoffrey!"

"Yes."

"How long are you going to read that horrid paper?"

"Only till Watson brings your beef-tea.

Then we'll go on with our novel."

"I do wish you wouldn't read those German things in here."

- "Why?"
- "Dear me, what odd creatures men are!"
- "How's that?" It was useless. The Wochenschrift was worsted. I laid it aside.
- "Now a woman would know in a minute that, unless she meant to be disagreeable, she mustn't sit in the same room with her husband reading an ugly language that he didn't know."
- "Oh, you don't like it because it's German."

  I laughed a little, with dreary indulgence.
- "Not in the least because it's German, though it's an atrocious language, but because I don't know it. It's like a wall between us as you sit there. It shuts me out."
- "But suppose it was in French, or even English, you wouldn't understand a medical magazine any better."
- "Ah, but then I could see for myself that it wasn't worth understanding."
- "Oh, I see. And you'd like German banished to the library?"

"Except when you want me to feel inferior and snubbed."

How well she knew how to impress her whims on my mind! I sat silent.

"I don't know why we should wait for Watson," I said, getting up and looking about for the book.

"Aunt Caroline used to say old Mrs. Lance's granddaughter was the only one who could manage her," my wife said, apparently continuing her own train of thought.

"Oh!" said I. "Where were we?" I turned the pages of the amazing production my wife had asked me to read aloud.

I was not in the habit of discussing my patients with Millicent, but the peculiar shrinking I felt at the prospect of hearing Mrs. Lance's household criticised or even commented upon should have warned me. As a matter of fact, however, I was conscious of nothing but a sudden gratitude towards my wife's taste for light

literature, and a new-born desire to read her favourite author aloud. I plunged with alacrity into "Golgotha: a Romance of Heaven and Earth," by the author of "Anathema," "Astarte," etc.

"Jiffy," my wife interrupted after a moment, "Mimi's feet are cold. You didn't tuck me up properly."

I laid down the book and rearranged the rugs. The front-door bell rang.

"Some horrid patient dying," my wife said, with charitable apprehension, as she rubbed the palm of her hand on the back of the sofa.

"What's the matter?" I said, noticing the action.

"Palm itches. 'Rub it on wood and it'll come to good.'"

Hurd announced Mrs. Baynton, and Watson followed with the beef-tea.

The two women greeted each other effusively.

I gathered that if my wife had not rubbed her

hand on the sofa back it would not have been Mrs. Baynton at the door, but a messenger from some suffering patient of mine.

We heard how Tom and Sarah and Kitty were, had our anxiety about the baby's cold allayed, and were told how it was that Charlie's headaches had prevented him from getting a scholarship. I sat meditating on the surprise and delight in store for society when some fond mother shall muster up courage to give as the reason for her darling's scholastic failure, "Stupidity, my dears, sheer stupidity."

Mrs. Baynton's numerous and curiously dull family would keep the two ladies going till bedtime, I was well assured. I got up and laid "Golgotha" reverently down.

"I have some work to do, Millicent," I said.
"I'll leave you and Mrs. Baynton to discuss public schools. Good-night." I held out my hand to my wife's old friend.

"Now just listen to him, Maria!" my wife

said. "I told you he'd taken to calling me Millicent before people. What makes you so horrid to me, Jiffy?"

"Horrid? Isn't Millicent your name?"

"I hate it simply, and I've told you so till I'm sick and tired; and nobody ever called me Millicent in their lives, did they, Maria?"

"No; I never heard you called anything but Mimi and Milly."

"There, Jiffy-what did I tell you?"

"All I can say is your parents made a mistake, although of course for a child it didn't matter so much."

"You see! He wants to make out I'm a grandmother," she turned to her friend almost crying.

"Not at all, but I see no good reason for a man of thirty-seven and a woman of thirty-six—"

"Jiffy!" my wife interrupted reproachfully.

"I don't see why they should cling to the

names that were well enough when they were in their nurseries, any more than they should keep on wearing bibs."

"I shall never call you anything but Jiffy except when you're bad to me. If I'm not loving you at all, I'll say Geoffrey."

I wished heartily that this small bone of contention had not been dragged out before Mrs. Baynton. I had the common masculine conviction that these dismal scenes we should enact alone. I turned away to find my paper.

"Jiffy, are you going to be a good boy?"

I looked about the room forgetting for the moment what I wanted.

"Jiffy, promise you won't call me Millicent any more."

"It's a very nice name," I said feebly; "I like using it."

"Very strange it's taken you sixteen years to find it out. You think it's horrid, don't you, Maria?"

Mrs. Baynton looked at me dubiously.

"If I weren't always a little afraid of you, Dr. Monroe, I'd say I agreed with your wife. 'Millicent' doesn't sound like her, somehow."

"There, there," cried my wife, with animation, holding out her arms. "Now you see. Come and tell Mimi you won't call her any more horrid names."

I seized my Wochenschrift and retreated.

The next afternoon as I was going out my wife asked me when I would be back.

"In time to dress for dinner," I answered carelessly.

"Well, I should hope so! But that means you won't get home till about seven o'clock."

"Oh, it may not be later than six."

"You're never home to tea now—you've been getting later and later."

"Not always. Wasn't it only the day before yesterday that I had the pleasure of finding the

entire Baynton family gathered round your teatable?"

"Now, Jiffy, you mustn't take dislikes to my friends."

"I didn't say I disliked them."

"But you do. And you go without your tea sometimes rather than meet them—such dears as the Bayntons are, too."

"A doctor can't keep very regular hours."

"You used always to come home and have tea with your Mimi."

"Yes, I used to have no practice. But I'll see if I can get through earlier to-day."

"Yes, do, Jiffy darling. And if you haven't time to come all the way home, mind you have your tea somewhere."

"Oh yes. That's what I do."

As I came downstairs from seeing Mrs. Lance that afternoon, Dorothy opened the library door. She stood there smiling up at me with an open book in her arms.

"I thought it sounded like your step," she said. "How early you are! Is grandmamma worse?"

"No, just the same; but I'm obliged to get home as soon as possible."

"Can't you come in just a moment?"

I buttoned up my coat with a business-like air and regretted I could not. "My housekeeper has a very bad diphtheritic sore throat; she needs watching."

"Oh, then, please," she said, looking very earnest, "I wonder if you'll do me a great kindness? Could you lend me Mercier's 'Nervous System and the Mind' if I'm very careful of it?"

"Mercier!" I echoed. "What do you want with him?"

"Oh, I'm reading up nerves now," she said, "and I've only got Maudsley here in the library, and one or two very old-fashioned authorities."

"Why are you reading up nerves?"

"Just because I like knowing something about it. I've always wanted to. I haven't said anything about it, because—because—well, people would understand it better if it were fancy-work, you know, and I wouldn't like to be thought a blue-stocking. If grandmamma were to get well, or if—if—I were left alone, I'd go to Germany and really study. There's nothing in the world so fascinating as biology. If I were a man, I'd give my life to it."

Her eyes were very bright, her face was for the moment like an enthusiastic schoolboy's.

"I'll bring you Mercier to-morrow," I said, "and if that doesn't satisfy you, I'll lend you a book I've just been reading—Ribot's 'L'Hérédité Psychologique,'" and I laughed. But she thanked me gravely, and said good-bye.

Well, I lent her Mercier and Bastian and

Wundt. I gave up taking Mrs. Lance in the general round, and used to take Dorothy and a cup of tea late in the afternoon on my way home. She devoured the technical books I lent her, and, still more surprising, she digested them. To talk to her about them and her own conclusions with regard to the questions they raised came to be the keenest intellectual stimulus of my days. Of course, as time went on, the inevitable happened. We talked less of mental science, scarcely at all of Mrs. Lance, and very much of ourselves. One occasion that dwells in my memory with peculiar vividness is a certain late sunshiny afternoon in the drawing-room at Hans Place, when Dorothy set down her untasted cup of tea and rushed to the piano to run over the Fantasia in F minor, which she had just been hearing Paderewski play. I had not been able to recall it clearly, and she could not rest till she had brought it back to me. She played with enthusiasm, with a new glow in her style, ejaculating every now and then:

"Oh, this is where he was so wonderful—wonderful—"

"O Dr. Monroe, you can't conceive what an inspired being that man is—" And a moment later:

"He plays like a god. It's sacrilege for any one else to touch Chopin. Oh! it was here he got that marvellous, half-delirious effect of—"

Fast and furious the chords fell down. The girl's cheeks took on a deeper colour, and her eyes shone like great jewels as they glanced along the notes. I lay back in my arm-chair listening, looking at her—yielding up my senses to the languorous new delight in subtly blended beauty.

I dare say I thought I was listening to Chopin. It is not in the scheme of things that a man should know at such a moment that he is sunning himself in the beauty of a woman—that the music is mixed with the light in her eyes, the play of white fingers, and the sway

of a lithe sweet body. He is not to know, apparently—at least he is not to remember—that Art herself is handmaiden to the mighty mother, and that Music and Poetry are mute or merely stammerers until they sing us Epithalamium.

As I sat there looking at the flushed sweet face, the light changed. A slanting sunbeam tangled itself in her hair. "It's not brown after all," I thought dreamily; "it's russet and gold."

"There!" her voice was chiming through the last notes. "You will never know in the least what that is like till you hear Paderewski play it."

I smiled.

"I never liked it so much before to-day," I answered.

"It's very odd," she said, coming back to the tea-table, and standing meditatively with her hands clasped behind her, "it's one of the oddest things in the world, how suddenly a familiar thing will take on a new face. Once or twice lately, I've felt that I must have been half blind and nearly deaf all my life—until now."

"That feeling comes usually out of some crisis. If some one near to us is in danger, or dies, or some disaster has put an edge on sensation, or—"

The girl's quick glance made me pause without knowing why. Her eyes travelled away again, and a soft vague light came over her face.

"Some disaster," she repeated, "or great gladness, or any awakening, I suppose." Her speech had the unfinished outline of un-self-conscious thought. I remember how her shifting moods puzzled me that day.

She sat down and lifted her tea-cup to her lips.

"Ugh! Quite cold."

- "Of course. What did you expect?"
- "And you won't let me have what has stood in the pot?"
  - "I don't prescribe tannin in your case."
- "I'll have some milk and cream." She filled a cup.
- "Much better for you," I said, with satisfaction.
- "Do you agree with whoever it is who says tea and coffee help to fill the insane asylums?"
- "I don't know that I go as far as that. Strong tea is certainly bad for the nerves and the digestion—"
- "If it's bad for the nervous system it must be more or less bad for the mind, mustn't it?"
- "Why are you so interested in everything that affects the mind?"
  - "Don't you think everybody ought to be?"
  - "You are particularly so."
  - "Yes; I'm particularly so."

The clock on the mantelpiece struck its tinkling bell six times.

"You must tell me sometime why," I said, getting up hurriedly.

"Yes; I'll tell you—sometime." She smiled, and gave me her hand.

THAT evening my wife was full of some gossip that Mrs. Baynton had brought her about old Mrs. Lance's family quarrels—how her relations said she had made a drudge of her granddaughter, and turned her into a sicknurse. I said, from what I had seen of Miss Lance, I thought she was capable of taking care of herself.

"You're horridly unsympathetic, Jiffy. Why, Mrs. Lance has cut her off from all young society, and won't even let her go to church."

"Are you sure Miss Lance wants to go to church?"

"Of course she does. Most people are not such heathens as you. Maria says her Kitty has called there twice lately with George Templeton, to take Dorothy to the church parade, and—"

"I thought you said 'to church'?"

"Oh well, it's the same thing—and each time Dorothy Lance had to admit she couldn't leave her old tyrant of a grandmother. Now, isn't it outrageous?"

"What do you want me to read to-night?"
I said.

"Oh, we'll go on with that great fat Thackeray that you think I ought to like. I can't read it. Go on where we left off." I found the book. "If I knew Mrs. Lance, I'd just tell her—"

"Here's the mark," I interrupted, and began to read.

"Haven't you got on a new waistcoat?"
Millicent said, in the middle of the first
paragraph.

"Eh? Oh! Yes."

"Awfully pretty. But you can't have it washed with those buttons in it—can you?"

"No; they come out." I lifted the book to my eyes again.

"Put on with rings?"

"I believe so." I went on reading.

She sat up and leaned over on my knees, examining my buttons. Presently I heard her whispering, as she touched one after another, "Friendship—Love—Indifference—Hate—Friendship—Love—"

"Dear Jiffy!" She put her hand across the place I was reading. "Are you sure you love me?"

"I'm sure I can't read through your hand."

"Tell me, Jiffy, when you were a child did you use to count your buttons to see what you were going to be?"

"No, can't say I did." The lamp was smoking a little. I turned down the wick.

"Well, it was very neglectful of you," she laughed—"saves a lot of uncertainty. You begin at the top and say, 'Rich man, Poor man, Beggar man, Thief, Doctor, Lawyer, Merchant, Chief,' over and over till you come to the end of a boy's buttons. The last one tells you his fate."

"I see." I went on.

"Now, why is it, I'd like to know," she interrupted, with sudden petulance, "why is it my hair isn't the colour of your beard? You don't want a goldie-brown beard—all you care about is that it should be close cropped and very pointed—now isn't it so?"

The lamplight fell on her delicate childish face, and on the carefully dressed thin hair that was faded and lustreless. She wore it down almost to her eyebrows, and the thin tracery was held firmly to its place by a fine net. The arrangement at the back was covered with a net too. At a distance her

head looked as if it were carved out of new wood.

I looked past my wife to another face that I knew by heart—a face with strong generous lines, and deep-set grey eyes that to think of set one's pulse to keeping quicker time. Above my wife's elaborate head I seemed to see Dorothy's piled-up masses of waving chest-nut-hair that "kinked" from the roots, and left her forehead white and unshadowed, except by an occasional wild little lock. I remembered how the late sun that very afternoon had come slanting in through the drawing-room window in Hans Place, and had picked out glints of unsuspected red in the thick brown masses. How white she was behind the ears!

"Penny for your thoughts, Jiffy."

I started.

"Oh! I was thinking about hair. What a lot of character there is in it!"

"Just what Madame Estelle the spiritualist

says. Her control can tell everything about a person from the merest scrap of hair."

I made an impatient movement to resume.

"But if I were you," she buzzed away contentedly, "I wouldn't be so proud of my goldie-brown locks and my angelic character."

"See here, I'm going back to the library if you don't want me to read. I've got a lot of work waiting—"

"Ugh! What a dreadful cross boy!" She raised herself up and looked at me reproachfully. "I haven't seen you look so ferocious since the day you burnt my dream-book. I shall ask Madame Estelle if goldie-brown hair isn't a sign of a violent temper."

Watson came in with a small tray. She placed it on my wife's lap, and went noiselessly out.

I began to read rapidly.

"Jiffy, don't gallop through it like that. It makes me nervous. Where's the salt? Now that idiotic Watson has never brought me—"

"Yes, here it is." I turned down the corner of the fringed napkin and revealed a little salt-cellar. I took some up in the spoon and held it towards the bouillon.

"No, no, no!" My wife withdrew the cup so hastily that she slopped some of the smoking contents over her shawl. "Now just see what you've made me do. Really, Geoffrey!"

"I'm very sorry." I pulled out my handkerchief and wiped the cashmere dry. "But why did you jerk the cup away?"

"You don't suppose I'd let you help me to salt, do you?"

"Oh," I said, comprehending at last, "I forgot."

"Well, I wish you wouldn't."

"And I wish you'd outgrow that nonsense. It's gaining on you so it will make your life utterly wretched."

"It's because I don't want to be utterly wretched that I won't let you do unlucky

things. If you help me to salt, you help me to sorrow," she said gravely, shaking the spoon over her cup. "There's only one thing in the world more unlucky."

"Stuff!" said I, trying to find the place I had lost again in the book.

"And that's spilling the salt on the cloth."
She returned the spoon to the tiny cellar, bending down to see if any had fallen on the napkin.

"Ah well," I sighed resignedly, "in any case you can put things right by throwing some over your shoulder." I had the remembrance before me of her frequent performance of the pantomime.

"Yes, but you don't always notice. Judas didn't."

<sup>&</sup>quot;Didn't he?"

<sup>&</sup>quot;Didn't he! As if you didn't know!"

<sup>&</sup>quot;No; how should I know?"

<sup>&</sup>quot;Good heavens, Geoffrey! didn't he betray our Lord?"

"So I'm told, but what has that to do with—"

"Anybody would think you'd never heard of the Last Supper. But you might, at least, remember the Leonardo."

" I do."

"Well, then, you must have seen that the salt-cellar by Judas is overturned."

"Is it really? I never noticed."

"No," said my wife a little grimly; "neither did Judas."

I began to read. "Set this down, will you?" my wife said presently. I relieved her of the tray.

"I suppose Dorothy Lance will have all that old heathen's money," said my wife.

"Strikes me you're not very much engrossed in the 'Adventures of Philip,'" I remarked.

"Just because I say something now and then? That's absurd, as I've always told you. You used to be dreadfully tyrannical about that. I believe it's a common failing among men. They make reading aloud such an awful ceremony that their poor wives would as soon interrupt a sermon in church as dare say a word. But if you're reading for pleasure—"

"It's most people's pleasure to pay attention if they care for the book."

"Now, Jiffy, you're going to be horrid again."

"No, I don't think so," I said, laughing shortly. "I'm quite willing to talk or to read, whichever you like."

"Well, go on with that stupid Philip. There's nothing else."

My wife read a vast amount of literature, more or less light, and read so rapidly and constantly it was sometimes a problem how to keep her supplied. On the ground of ill-health she had long ago given up going out among her friends, and by degrees her acquaintances fell away from her. Indeed, her only regular

visitor now was her distant cousin, Mrs. Baynton, or some other member of the Baynton family. Of course she had every care and attention, but her days were bare of responsibility or healthful activity. I used to shudder when I stopped to think what life must be under such conditions.

Evenings at home were so absolutely uniform that, but for subsequent events, those I have described, and yet another, would have faded out of my memory. This other was a certain Sunday evening when Dorothy Lance was even more persistently and vividly present to me than usual. I had fallen into the habit of sitting with a book in my hand, staring into vacancy, seeing nothing but that calm, beautiful face—waiting for the eyelids to lift and the mouth to smile. On this Sunday evening I was sitting in an arm-chair before my library fire waiting for the miracle to come to pass, when the door opened and my wife came in.

"What is it?" I said, jumping to my feet, for she seldom or never followed me here. She was not looking ill, but rather unusually animated. She held something out to me between her thumb and finger.

"Do you see the stranger?"

"The what?" I stooped down to look closer.

I saw a faint gleam of white filaments.

"It's dandelion-down, don't you see?" She came and held it under the student-lamp. "I saw it coming slowly across the hall from the front door. It means a stranger coming into our life. I wanted to see whether it was after you or me. I've been sitting out there under the hall lamp for half an hour." I put her into my chair. In spite of her shawls and wraps her teeth were chattering. "It came straight towards your door, Geoffrey. It's somebody coming for you."

"Well, it will be a very unwelcome patient who sends for me to-night." I sat down in a

low chair and poked the fire. "Never saw such weather for this time of the year."

"I don't believe it's a patient. It's somebody who is coming into our life."

Dorothy's face flitted before my eyes. I poked the fire angrily. Was this mania for omens infecting my imagination too?

"I'll tell you, Jiffy. We'll burn the stranger for a witch." She leaned over and took the poker out of my hands.

"You'll put the fire out if you-"

"I'm not going to poke, only to prop the poker on the top bar of the grate. So! Now lay the tongs across. Now that'll keep the witches out of the house. Sign of the cross, you see! Now we'll burn the stranger." She leaned farther over, opened her thumb and finger, and dropped the down just over the flames. It wavered an instant, and then flew out directly into my face.

"Ha! Didn't I tell you it had come for

you?" my wife said laughing. She snatched at it with an affectation of ferocity. "Come and be burnt, you witch." She held it towards the flames again. The moment she released it out it came once more, brushing my face with its fairy wings.

"Well, I hope you're satisfied now," my wife said, looking at me with wide, startled eyes. "You see it won't give you up."

"No," I said, "not while I sit in the draught between the door and the fireplace."

"Well, we'll see. The third time is the charm." She took the winged seed again, and dropped it behind the bank of flaming coals.

"There, it flew up the chimney!" she screamed. "Jiffy, it was a witch, and it's got away!"

"I didn't see it go up," I said; but by some queer mental antic I saw my day-dreams suddenly in a grotesque new light.

"Geoffrey, I'm all of a shiver. Wasn't it

uncanny the way it seemed to fly to you for protection?"

I jumped up and began to pace the room.

"I wish I could make you realise," I said, "how terribly you are weakening the fibre of your mind, and even your physical health, by all this nonsense."

"Now, Jiffy, don't begin to lecture. You'll make my head ache, and that won't do my fibres the least good."

"No; seriously—seriously, these superstitions are eating into your life. I don't believe there's any one in the world such a martyr to signs and auguries as you are."

"Oh, all nice women are superstitious. It's only the horrid unfeminine creatures who are superior to it."

"No; you may depend upon it, nobody carries it to the extent that you do. How you ever heard of all those damnable omens is a mystery to me."

"Geoffrey, please don't swear. It's much better to be superstitious than to be irritable and use bad language."

"But tell me how you ever got hold of such a lot of—" I checked myself. "Who told you all these things?"

"Oh, my old mulatto nurse told me a lot of them, and—"

"Yes, of course. It begins in the cradle. I see. Well—and then?"

"Oh, I collect them. I get a new one every now and then in books or from people. Watson told me about wishing on a load of straw, and then, you know"—she went on in a quite different tone, animated, almost gay—"after you've made your wish, you've got to shut your eyes, and not open them till the straw is out of sight. If you catch a glimpse of it after you've wished, you'll lose what you asked for. One of my Canadian cousins told me how to tell fortunes with apple-seeds, and

about naming an eyelash. You know that one?"

She appealed to me with the good-humour of one connoisseur presenting another with a valuable specimen. "See if I can pull one out without hurting myself."

"Stop!" I cried. "I don't want-"

"There!—there it is! Now I'll show you."
She laid the single lash on the back of her hand. I turned away impatiently—there was no making the slightest impression on her.

"Now come, Jiffy, you must help."

"You know quite well I'll never help you with any such tomfoolery."

"Oh, don't be horrid. Look here, help me to wish, and I'll listen to your lecture afterwards. Now, I never made you such a handsome offer before. Come." I stood with my back to her, looking at the titles on a row of medical books. She pulled my sleeve. "If it's for my good to be lectured, you oughtn't to neglect it. And

this is the condition. You make a fist—so." She doubled up my fingers. "Now, there's the eyelash on the back of my hand—see? Now I'll name it: 'Geoffrey Monroe. Do you love Mimi?' Now you must knock my hand up in the air from underneath with your fist. If the eyelash stays on my hand, it means yes. If it flies away, it means no, and you're a very bad, wicked boy, and I've found you out."

I turned and faced her, laying my hands on her shoulders.

- "Will you ever grow up and be a woman?"
- "Oh, you've knocked the winker off!"
- "Sit down here and let me tell you something." I put her into my chair and drew up another. "First, should you take me for a superstitious person?"
- "You?" she laughed. "Why, you wouldn't even say 'Bread and butter' on our honey-moon when you'd gone one side of a tree or a lamp-post, and I the other—although I

told you over and over again if a thing like that came between us as we walked, we'd be sure to quarrel. No, dear, no one could accuse you of—"

"Well, then, let me tell you that even I find myself infected by your constant dwelling on these things. I begin to notice them—that's the first step. It is to many a case of 'First endure, then pity, then embrace.' Of course I can fight against being influenced, but to be conscious of having to shake one's self out of superstition is an evidence of a lapse from sanity. You have taught me how jealously we should guard this delicate mechanism." I tapped her on the temple. "We can't afford to trifle with it. It takes horrible revenge on us for any tampering. The moment you give hospitality to a thought, you are more or less at its mercy. With my reason, I know that when a black cat comes into the house I have no more cause to expect good luck than I have

to fear the reverse if a bird flies into the room; but—"

"Oh yes," ejaculated my wife, "don't you remember at Tours—"

"No, I don't want to remember, and I don't want you to remember. I begin to get glimpses of the danger of all this kind of thing even to the sound and sane. There is something monstrous in the tyranny of thought. No one's nerves are proof against association. You can't be too careful of the kind of images you admit into your mind. 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things.'"

"Dear me, Geoffrey, you ought to have been a parson."

I had risen, and stood with my back to the fire, speaking with all the conviction and

emphasis of one who brings himself at last to say a thing that long has lain in his heart.

"I tell you," I went on, "I would have that prescription given to every creature in the kingdom. It is the first condition of health."

"Isn't it out of the Bible?"

"Yes; but it's excellent hygiene, for all that. You haven't understood my feeling about superstition, Milly. It's not that I have a mere prejudice against it. It's not because it's a remnant of barbarism, and a laughing-stock to science. It's because it is enervating, and makes for disease."

"Then half the women in London are in a bad way."

"Far be it from me to contest that."

"It was awfully difficult when I first came to London to hear of a really good fortune-teller. Now they're as thick as blackberries." "I don't know what you mean by a really good fortune-teller. But how do you come to know they have increased?"

She did not answer. But I knew the look on her face. She was a truthful woman, who called in obstinate silence at times when some of her sex would have prevaricated.

"You look at the advertisements," I said. She nodded, but I saw she had other sources of information. "Come, we are discussing the thing frankly," I said. "How do you come to be so sure that good fortune-tellers are as thick as blackberries in London?"

"Well," she said hesitatingly, "Aunt Caroline said I wasn't to tell you, because you were crotchety. She knows scores, and used to take me. She was always hearing of some new person who was better than all the rest. They charge frightfully now. There's a lot of money made that way in London—oh! a

frightful lot. But, you see, there's some idiotic law about obtaining money under false pretences, and it's kept dark."

I walked up and down the room.

"It has probably always existed in one form or another," I meditated aloud. "Astrology, at least, has had its day and ceased to be."

"Oh, don't you flatter yourself!" My wife had apparently developed an interest in making the case out as bad as possible. It was a way of excusing herself. "I know three astrologers at this moment in London, and four in Paris."

"I hope you don't keep up the acquaintance," I said rather angrily.

"You know quite well I've been ill, and haven't gone anywhere. Besides, horoscopes are quite dull, compared to palmistry, and planchette, and crystal-gazing, and having your character told by handwriting or a lock of your hair."

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated, in hopeless disgust at the catalogue.

I took a turn up and down the room.

"And one of the queerest things in the whole business is, that you are what is called a religious woman."

"Queer! You mean with such a discouraging husband, I suppose," she said sharply.

"I mean in spite of your heathen proclivities."

"What are you talking about?"

I stopped before her.

"That you should be a professing Christian, and a more or less responsible human being, and yet totally unable to see how the rank paganism and fetishism of your superstition stultifies your religious creed!"

"Oh, you don't understand these things. You can't be expected to. You're always reading atheistical German magazines. You never go to church. How you happened to

know that text of St. Paul's I can't make out, for you never read your Bible. If you did, you'd see that a Christian is bound to believe in ghosts and visions and dreams and witches. I dare say you don't even know where the Witch of Endor lived."

"No, and I don't care."

"Why, she lived at Endor, you silly," and she laughed triumphantly. Her good-humour was fully restored. "You see, people in society," she went on, "are so much more interested in ghosts and things than they used to be."

"That's partly the fault of the Society for Psychical Research. They've fostered and dignified people's morbid illusions and incipient insanities until the person without a ghost story, or an augury fulfilled, has felt out of fashion. Psychical Research should never be popularised. It's full of peril to the strongest, and the idea of putting such a

two-edged sword into the hands of the clumsy and ignorant was the inspiration of a mind unhinged."

"You can't say the Psychical Research people invented palmistry parties."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, didn't you know? They're the great rage in London now. Lots of the smart people give them; an afternoon tea, you know, and a palmist in a powder-room, or some little place by herself, and the guests go in one by one, and come out all creepy and delightful, after hearing the most astounding things."

"Millicent"—I stood before her—"don't you care enough to please me, to make a fight against this superstition?"

"Why, I don't go to the palmistry parties—worse luck. Haven't I just told you they've only come in since I've been ill?"

"No, no, I don't mean the parties only; I

mean the whole wretched business—signs, symbols, character-reading, dreams—"

"Don't be idiotic, Geoffrey; you can't give up dreams if they don't give you up."

"But you can give up dwelling on them.
You can give up telling them."

"That's merely dull. That doesn't change anything."

"Ah, but it does! I sometimes think nothing exists except by virtue of being expressed. Certainly an idea has no independent life until we deliver ourselves of it. The moment it is born into speech, it goes out in the world to work its way and propagate, and we have added to the sum of good or ill. If we can't follow St. Paul's advice and think only things that are true and of good report, we can at least refrain from soiling other minds by giving them of our dust and ashes."

"Jiffy, you're dreadfully extravagant. All this because I burnt a thistle-down! Wasn't

a bit of use, either," she said, getting up and yawning, with her eye on the fire. "There is a stranger on the bar now. Good-night, Jiffy; you've made my head ache with your sermonising."

I REACHED the house in Hans Place the next day as usual, about four o'clock, in the midst of a steady downpour. As I stood waiting for the butler to open the door I felt a momentary lifting of the spirit. All day I had been hag-ridden by a vague new impression. The daily round, old anxieties and new failures loomed mountain-high, and there was something else in the background, something that my mind refused to face—a sense of complication and of strain.

My visit to Mrs. Lance's room was not prolonged. She was in a very capricious mood, and wanted me to try some new medicine she had been reading about. I compromised, promising to try something new that I had been reading about. I had waked her out of the best sleep she had had for forty-eight hours, she said. I left her with the feeling that everybody in the world was in the vilest of tempers, myself, of course, included. I would go home and shut myself up.

I came downstairs wondering why Dorothy had not appeared as usual in Mrs. Lance's room.

"She's in the doldrums too, I suppose." I crossed the hall, turning my head about for a glimpse of her, fearing I should see her with the day's cloud upon her face—fearing I should not see her at all. I opened the front door and saw that the rain had turned to fog.

"Brr-rr!" I shivered.

"Dr. Monroe," a low voice called. I turned. Dorothy was standing on the drawing-room threshold with a blaze of light behind her. "Are you called somewhere?" she said, her look of welcome and expectancy fading.

"N-no; I was going home."

"Oh, but please don't—not just yet. I wanted particularly to see you to-day. Just come and see what a splendid fire I have in here."

She stepped back and I looked in. She had had the curtains drawn, the lamps lit, and a "Christmas fire" was roaring in the wide grate, picking out the silver tea-urn, and lighting up the pale sea-green china on the low tea-table.

"You are certainly very comfortable."

"When the weather doesn't behave, one has only to shut it out." She closed the door. "Now! It doesn't exist so far as we are concerned. Sit there." She rolled my chair, as she called it, to the fire. "Now you shall have tea."

I took off my overcoat and established my-

self by the table, saying something perfunctory about the Arctic weather.

"There's one thing I like particularly about the English climate," she said—"it's almost always cold enough to have a fire. And a fire is a thing of beauty and a joy for ever."

"This one is," I said, looking at the blaze. She handed me my tea.

"People don't half appreciate open fires. The moment they can do it, without dying of cold, they stuff up their chimneys, and put dull screens and things before their grates; they don't seem to recognise that they can have nothing on earth so decorative in a room as a fire. Now just look round us, for instance. Here are all these pictures and bronzes, and the Turkey carpets—good ones, too!—and yet nothing in the room is so valuable to its general effect as the fire."

"Particularly on a day like this," I amended,

and drank my tea with a growing sense of comfort.

"I've been out to-day in spite of the weather. Went to the stores for grandmamma. Do you ever go to the stores?"

"Not often. I believe my housekeeper goes every week or so."

"They're not agreeable resorts on a wet day. I came home cold and miserable."

"I hope you changed your things," I said, looking down to see if I could discover the state of her shoes.

"Yes, of course, and I put on my cheerful slippers." She thrust out a narrow foot shod in bright red morocco.

"Cheerful!" I said, with a little start. "I should say hilarious even," and we both laughed loud and long.

"They are beautiful," she said, looking at them with affection, "and whenever I'm at all low in my mind, I fly to them as topers do to the bottle. The moment I get my red slippers on I'm restored—I'm ready to dance and sing." She patted the thick carpet softly with her pointed red toes.

"Do you have little fads about your shoes and slippers?" she said.

"Fads?" I echoed, passing my cup for more tea. "What kind of fads?"

"Well, don't you feel, for instance, that the kind of shoes you're wearing affects your moods?"

"Most certainly, if they pinch."

"No, no, I don't mean that at all. I mean if I wear patent leather I have a discreet, almost mincing little walk; if I have on brown Russia I strike out freely into a good country stride; if I have on white satin I instantly feel a kind of elegance stealing over me—you mustn't laugh—I positively do feel that whitesatin slippers impose a sort of grace on one;

and any coloured-satin shoe makes me pine to be dancing."

"And red morocco the same?"

"No, no, not the same thing at all. I don't want to dance steps in red morocco, but just to whirl about and—and be cheerful."

We laughed again, as contented people do on small provocation.

"If I were a doctor I'd prescribe bright red shoes for all my melancholy patients," she said.

"You're very determined in your crusade against depression. Is that cocoa you are drinking again?"

"Yes, I have it every now and then. I don't think so much tea and coffee is good for me."

"So much? I never noticed that you drank more than most people."

"Perhaps not, but most people overdo it."

"Oh, the tea and coffee you drink isn't going to hurt you."

"You don't know." She said it so seriously that I looked up.

"That's what I've been wanting to talk to you about." She left the table and came and sat on a low chair opposite me. "Don't you think, Dr. Monroe, that it's very stupid to go blindly through the world without any clear idea of one's probable inheritance, and one's duty to—to the possible future?"

"Why, yes."

"Don't you think it's a mistake for a woman to run the risk of making other people"—it may have been the reflection of the fire, but I thought at the time that she flushed slightly—"making other people pay in weakness or disease for her—her ignorance—and—reticence about herself?"

"Of course." I set down my cup and leaned forward.

"Well, then, you won't be surprised that I've taken a great deal of interest in knowing about my parents, and trying to find out what legacy they've left me."

"I understand."

"I have always known that my father had a gloomy, unhappy disposition, but it was only about a year ago that my grandmother told me that my mother—my mother died insane."

"Indeed, I hadn't heard."

"Nobody in England knows it. They lived abroad. And both she and my father died young. I was only a few months old."

There was a pause. I waited for more.

"I suppose you think it's a bad lookout for me," she said, "but I've come not to think so."

I looked at the radiant young creature before me, and smiled to myself.

"You have come to think-"

"That a person with a fair amount of bodily health and a certain strength of will, who is aware of the weak place in the constitution—aware of it, not frightened by it, you see"

—she lifted and dropped her forefinger on her knee with an old-fashioned air of impartial exposition—"such a person being forewarned, and having the sense to profit by his knowledge, may—don't you think so, too?—isn't it very likely?—he may, by care and moderate watchfulness, keep the taint from ever appearing. Oh, I've been thinking it out and getting the thing clear to myself for the last twelve months. Nobody inherits absolute health. To know what you have a tendency towards is a great advantage if you're not weak-minded."

"Ah, but so many people are."

"Well, I suppose that's the kind of weakness that must go to the wall. But suppose a
person strong enough to bear the truth about
himself, and about the laws of health, without
letting it unnerve him—he has an advantage,
I've come to think, over the man who starts
out with no particular or recognised taint and
no knowledge of his body or his mind—or, if

knowledge, no will to enforce it. The ignorant person is as likely to develop disease—don't you think?—as the forewarned man who carries the seeds of it about with him, but who orders his life wisely and—and—without fear."

I stared abstractedly into the fire.

"I've said it incoherently, although I've so often imagined myself telling you what I felt; and now that I've done so, I dare say you think I'm wrong."

"I think we are all very much in the dark still about heredity—" I paused.

"And you think, on the whole, that any one with such an inheritance as mine ought—ought never—for instance, to marry?"

The speech jarred on me. She saw it, but she did not understand my feeling any more than, at that time, I did myself.

"Forgive me. I—you see I have no one to discuss these things with," she said, "and I'm sure a girl ought very early in life to have a

definite understanding with herself. It must be easier to decide such a question in the abstract. She ought not to wait till she is face to face with—with—"

Our eyes met and she flushed again—more painfully. I felt a sudden quite new impulse towards the strong sensitive creature sitting there.

"You misunderstand me." I got up and stood by the end of the mantelpiece, watching the firelight flicker in the girl's face. "I don't know that I'm prepared to follow Weismann altogether, but I am certainly disposed to think environment the bigger side of the health question. Your conditions have been excellent. Your strength, as I've had occasion to see in the sick-room, is remarkable. Your nerves are the best of servants to you, and if I were asked to instance a woman who was sound to the core, I think I would say, 'Come forward, Miss Dorothy Lance.'"

She stood up, with her clasped hands under her chin, her lips parted, her eyes liquid and shining.

- "You'd say that?" she said.
- "I would, and I've known you nearly a year."
  - "But my mother—"
- "My dear child, there are fewer families than you think quite free from some such instance. Your mother's illness may very probably have been due to causes as fortuitous and mechanical as an injury received in a railway accident. It may have been a case of puerperal mania, since she died so soon after your birth. It means very little."
- "My grandmother doesn't like me to talk about it. She and my mother were not friends. She doesn't tell me much—"
- "I would never give it another thought if I were you."

We stood there, each smiling into the other's

face—I too happy at having called up that look of radiant gladness into the girl's eyes, too content with her contentment, to analyse or question. It was only later, looking back, that I wondered whether she had deceived herself in thinking she was without fear. Had I reassured her? Had I dissipated the dread she declared did not exist? No, I could not believe it. If ever there was a woman of absolute sincerity, sanity, and self-knowledge, she was that woman. I see now-what I ought perhaps to have seen then—that it was not the doctor who had reassured her, but the manor rather that she craved assurance not so much of her own health of mind as of mine. I know now that she felt instinctively she was bound to let me know as much as she did of her family history—that she spoke, not to the doctor and the friend, but behind them to the man she was beginning to look on as a lover.

IT was one evening in May, a month or so after the talk about heredity, that we were discussing a new novel we had both been reading.

"The man made me think of you sometimes," she said—"I mean in his home surroundings."

"Indeed?" I said. "I don't see the least resemblance."

"Yes, in his loneliness and his kindness to his servants, and that kind of thing."

I laughed.

"This is embarrassing. It must be from me that you've gathered these flattering impressions. But I've misled you. I'm very little concerned about my servants."

"Oh, I haven't forgotten that day you wouldn't come in and have tea because you were anxious about your housekeeper's sore throat."

<sup>&</sup>quot;Ah well!—that—"

"She must be rather an interesting creature.

How old a woman is she? You never tell me
anything about your—"

"She's anywhere from forty to fifty, and she's as little interesting as any one you ever saw in your life."

"One or two things you've let drop about her have seemed to me very interesting."

"Oh, she's a good creature. She's been invaluable since my wife's health broke down."

"Your wife?" I hear the sound in my ears still, and my nerves twitch and tighten. Shall I ever forget the look in her face as she echoed herself under her breath:

## "Your wife!"

She stared at me with a kind of pathetic bewilderment. Then quite suddenly she flushed scarlet and looked down. I bent over her, saying I know not what broken, distracted words; stung by her look into instant realisation of how far we had unconsciously drifted. Not a syllable of love-making had passed between us—it seems, as I look back, almost the only thing in the world we had not discussed, for we were close friends now, friends of a year's standing. As I stood over the girl, looking down on her bowed head, I realised with horrible distinctness how she had crept into the very heart of my life, and what an agony it would be to tear her out.

"Tell me how you came to think I was unmarried." No answer. She sat motionless. "Oh, tell me, my friend! Was it I? Was it my doing? Did I ever say anything to make you think—"

I thought she was crying. She lifted her face. It was set and dry-eyed. The sight of it moved me more than tears.

- "It doesn't matter," she said, and stood up.
- "My dear," I cried out, catching her hand,
  "don't look like that—I can't bear it!"
  - "It would have been better to tell me," she

said, speaking with difficulty and turning to go. But I held her fast.

"You don't understand. I never speak of my home life. I-I wouldn't even to you complain of it; and I-oh, don't you understand that I've been glad to forget it when I've been with you!" She gave me a piteous little upward glance, and dropped her head. "We have had the whole wide world to roam about in. Believe me, I never meant to mislead you by not taking you across that one threshold. I thought, of course, you knew I was married. I would have sworn I'd mentioned my wife at the beginning. She knows of you; I supposed, of course, you had heard of her. I've thought your silence about her was intuitive and characteristic." And I told her what she had come to be to me, and how it was only that day, that very hour, that I fully understood how it was with us. I tried to draw her down beside me on the sofa, but she shrank

away, and went and leaned on the mantelpiece.

"Confess," I said, "that you were taken by surprise as well as I!"

"No," she said gravely. "I have known for months. I knew when I refused George Templeton in the winter. I've been thinking it might be all the money grandmamma means to leave me—that it was that, perhaps, that stood between us—you might have only your practice and might fancy—oh well, it doesn't matter now," she said, drawing her hand across her face. "I think you must tell me a little about your wife, please."

- "What shall I tell you?" I said miserably.
  - "Why have you drifted so apart?"
- "We were never truly together. We were boy and girl, and as ignorant of each other as we were of life."
  - "But you cared for her once?"
  - "Yes, as a boy cares—for a pretty face."

- "And that sort of 'caring' doesn't last?"
- "Not always, it seems." Underneath my own bitterness I heard her bitter question—
  - "Does anything of this kind last?"

"Don't torture me, my friend. Long ago we agreed to recognise that nothing is stationary; everything is either growing or decaying. There's no love so great that it may not dwindle, or so steadfast that it may not strengthen and develop along new lines as life goes on. We can no more stand still than the stars. Yesterday you and I seemed anchored in friendship; to-day—to-day we are adrift."

"No, no," she said, putting out her hands appealingly. "We're not adrift. We are two sane, tolerably honest people. We must take counsel together. No, sit where you are!" She motioned me back as I rose and came forward. "Tell me truly, have I come between you and your wife?"

<sup>&</sup>quot;No-no indeed!"

- "Have I in the least lessened your kindness to her?"
  - "You have made all kindness easier to me."
- "Is there any difference in your relation towards her since our friendship began?"
- "Yes, a happy man is always more tolerant, more gentle. I am more considerate of her, I think, than I used to be."
  - "And she has no suspicion?"
  - "None whatever."
- "Then I will tell you what we must do. We must hold fast to our friendship and keep it free of stain. It shall hurt no one and it will help us." Her mouth quivered, and I was thankful to see the stony look melting out of her face. "You will see I can be a good friend," she went on. "You will come here day after day as long as grandmamma lives. Our life will go on just the same. The only difference is I am enlightened now—I understand. Good-bye till to-morrow." She left

the mantelpiece and came and took my hand an instant. Before I could answer her, she was at the door, looked back, nodded with a wintry little smile, and was gone.

So this is the end! I said to myself. George Templeton will have a successor, and—well, well—I took my hat and left the house.

BUT it was not the end. Templeton had his successor in Guy Mallard, who had no better luck.

When Mrs. Lance complained to me privately of Dorothy's rejection of another eligible, I felt a guilty responsibility. Was I spoiling her life? I gathered myself together, and formed an instant plan of action.

When I went downstairs, I told Dorothy I was going to put Mrs. Lance's case into other hands, and meant to go abroad.

She turned sharply and studied my face. A

look of relief came over her own. "You've heard about Guy," she said smiling. "It's of no use to threaten me, sir. I shall not marry, no matter what you do; and you must see that, since you have brought me to this frame of mind, it would be cruel to go away and leave me without—without anything to make life worth living."

The beautiful face was very soft and tender.

I went and looked out of the window with misty eyes.

"Come," she said, "we need cheering before we go to lessons. I've got a new song." She sat down and ran over a prelude. She played and sang to me till it was time for me to go.

The next morning I was coming, as usual, out of Wilfred Ballantyne's house, when Dorothy's maid met me at the door with a letter in her hand.

"Good-morning, sir. Miss Dorothy thought I'd catch you here."

"What is it?" I said suspiciously, turning over the envelope. "Anybody ill?"

"Oh no, sir; just a message from Miss Dorothy," and the discreet Abigail went her way.

Inside the brougham I broke the seal and read:

" 2 A.M.

"DEAR DR. MONROE: I've not been able to sleep for thinking you might carry out your threat of going away. I've been tormented by the possibility of your leaving town before we could meet again. I see how you might think you were doing me a kindness even, instead of the greatest injury it is in your power to inflict. I must ask you to remember that a woman of twenty-four should not be treated as a child. It is only fair to give me a voice in my own destiny. You must not do us both so great a wrong as to wrench our lives apart. If such an 'end' brought suffering to me alone, I think I

could hold my peace; but I know it would be an evil day for you too. Our comradeship is good to you, my friend. You are a different man from the Dr. Monroe who came here last summer, and used to frighten me with his cynicism and his solemn looks. How often you've said, 'Before our meeting, life was merely a thing to be endured, and now—'

"'Hush, hush!' I hear you saying. 'I'm not thinking of myself.'

"Very well, then, think of me. You have simply created a new heaven and a new earth for me, and you can't undo that. You can only take away my guide and friend, and leave me infinitely lonely. After all, the world's a big place, and the chance of stumbling on one's alter ego in the crowd is none of the best. Most women grow up and marry and die, and they never in all their days have so much as touched the hand of their heart's true comrade. Most of us go wearily up and down the world

looking into this strange face and that, with the silent question, 'Art thou he?' until our eyes are dim, and our hearts are sick, and we can only muster strength, poor hypocrites, to deny that all our life 'has been but waiting till he came.' Will you think me overbold if I say that I know quite well that you and I were made each to be the other's friend? You can do for me what no other human being can, and the service I can show you is something you shall look for in vain from any other hand.

"How we bandy big words about Life and Success or Failure! Life is the power to search our comrade out and cherish him; Failure is to miss him by the way.

"Why should you want me to marry? Wouldn't it be sad enough if I'd been married already when we met? That I should so hamper myself now is simply inconceivable. You are blinded by the conventional concern of a girl's friends to get her married at all

costs. Forgive me if I say it's the least worthy trait I've discovered in you.

"Please don't punish me for not being able to be more to you than your devoted friend,
"DOROTHY."

I went to her in the late afternoon with a full heart. Never had she seemed to me more restful and tender, more utterly beautiful, body and soul. That was the last time we ever discussed the possibility of parting. I dare not be so boastful as to say that I could, unhelped, have kept faithful to the standard the girl's pride and principle had set up before us; but it is certain there was no moment of our intercourse, in those beautiful three years that followed, that even her sensitiveness could recall with shrinking or shadow of regret.

IT was a year ago last spring that Mrs. Lance began to fail, and about the same time her grandnephew, Captain Donald M'Kay, came home from India, and made the old lady's house his London headquarters. She hadn't seen him since he was a boy, and, contrary to her custom where her relations were concerned, she conceived a violent liking for that rather dull young man. I soon saw that the wily old woman would be found match-making on her death-bed, and I was naturally revolted at the idea of the peerless Dorothy being obliged to submit to her kinsman's awkward attentions. To my no small discomfort Dorothy seemed rather to like the Captain. I used to come away from my visits those days with a sickness at my heart. Not a word with Dorothy alone, and the hulking Captain always underfoot. Mrs. Lance was growing weaker daily, and when she was gone, how in God's name was I to see Dorothy? How could I help losing her?

All such madnesses vanished instantly before the light of her eyes. But when I was away from her I could not help knowing and feeling in every nerve of my body that others, whether men or women, were by her side, and could serve her, and worship her, in ways denied to me. I could not help knowing that, however little she might really care for him, another man had the right to press his suit upon her, and proclaim himself, however hopelessly, her lover. I wondered sometimes whether the jealousy of distrust can be any more agonising than the pain which may coexist with the most perfect confidence.

I used to go through sharp crises of what, I suppose, I must call jealousy. Not that, deep down in my heart, I had a moment's doubt of Dorothy's love and faith. But on the surface the sheer pain of absence and renunciation would translate itself into a sort of reproach, and I would tell myself—knowing all the time

it was a lie—that she was less considerate, less solicitous to spare me suffering, than she might have been.

Yes, those were evil days. I used to come home and sit by my wife's sofa in the evening, listen to her repinings, and answer her questions, and wonder dully how long it would last. The strain told on me by and by, and I found the pressure on my patience more and more difficult to bear. Was it partly, too, my long association with a clear-headed, logical-minded girl that made my poor invalid's fancies and vagaries more trying than of old? I don't know. At all events, I used to school myself to answer gently and sympathetically, and with infinite pains to be kind. I believe I usually succeeded after a fashion. But I used to think: In all the years she's lived beside me, I've been able to teach this wife of mine nothing-nothing. Every little scrap of prejudice and superstition that she brought to me as a girl she had

religiously kept. With her, superstition was a cult; it stood her instead of poetry, learning, or friends. She had a sign for every event of life, and an omen for every dream. How I had laboured in the years gone by, by reason and ridicule, to root this vile weed out! I might as well have tried to bottle up the night, and show her an empty phial as a proof there was nothing to fear in the dark. Her mind was a kind of quicksilver, impossible to grasp or discipline. As I say, I had long given up that task; just as, after taking her about half over the world, I had long ago given up the attempt to get her back to normal physical health. I had only harassed and wearied her in both cases; but the years brought wisdom. I used to find myself thinking it "merely typical" in this woman, whose affection and loyalty I had never known falter, that in all the years we had lived side by side she had never taken to heart my contempt for the attitude of mind that gives

popular superstition its hold on the imagination. She had never in all that time spared me one detail of broken glass, or a passing under a ladder, "a winding-sheet in the candle," or any of the foolish notions that she nursed and I abhorred. She would now, after eighteen years' experience, call upon me with querulous childish horror to notice how I'd crossed my knives at dinner, or had my hair cut in some unpropitious phase of the moon. These things had always annoyed me, but never so much as now. As I say, it must have been by contrast.

I CAME home from Mrs. Lance's one afternoon in June without seeing Dorothy. She had left me a little note on the oak chest in the hall, to say she had gone to a concert with Captain M'Kay. This had happened twice before. She had several times dined out, too, with long-neglected friends, and gone to the theatre

under her cousin's escort. Was she growing restless? Was she beginning to care seriously for— No, no. I shook myself free from the thought. But it was not to be denied that Dorothy was going about a good deal for the first time since I had known her. Had the old life tired her at last? What more natural? What more inevitable? With damnable iteration the question, in one form or another, kept beating at my brain.

I went into my wife's sitting-room for a cup of tea. She was not there, but it was early. She was probably upstairs dressing. One of her eccentricities was to change her dress four or five times a day, although she saw no one, and never went out except for a drive when the weather was fair.

I sat waiting till five o'clock. Then I rang. "Bring tea," I said. "Where is Mrs. Monroe?"

<sup>&</sup>quot;She-er-she's out, sir."

<sup>&</sup>quot;Out!" I exclaimed. "Where?"

- "She's took Watson, sir. She always goes on Wednesdays at this time."
  - "Not on foot?"
  - "No, sir. In a cab."
- "In a cab?" I repeated incredulously. I thought I saw in the maid's face a desire to enlighten me. "Bring tea," I said hastily. I sat and pondered.

Presently I heard voices in the hall. I opened the door and saw my wife taking off her countless wraps.

She turned and caught sight of me.

- "O Jiffy, are you home? How early you are!" She came forward and kissed me.
- "You're cold," I said, drawing her into the room, and I made her chair comfortable with the cushions and footstool. The tea was brought in. When the servant was gone, I brought my wife a cup, and put it on the small table at her side.

<sup>&</sup>quot;You must be feeling much better," I said.

<sup>&</sup>quot;Why?"

- "Surely, if you are able to go out for a cabdrive on a windy afternoon like this."
  - "No, I'm not better at all."
  - "Where did you go?"
- "I don't know if you'll like it, Jiffy, and I must go, you know."
  - "Where?"
  - "To Mrs. Sanderson's in Margaret Street."
  - "Who is Mrs. Sanderson?"
  - "Oh, she's a kind of sibyl."
  - "Kind of what?"
  - "Sibyl—prophetess—"
  - "Don't talk nonsense, Milly."
- "It's not nonsense at all. She never makes a mistake. She's simply wonderful. I looked into the crystal ball to-day. Ugh! I sha'n't do that again."
- "Do you mean to say you've been going to some wretched fortune-teller's?"
- "Now, you see! I felt you'd only scoff, and so I wouldn't tell you."
  - "How can you be so foolish?" I sat down

with my tea-cup in my hand, feeling jaded and out of sorts.

"It's not in the least foolish; and oh, Jiffy, I wish you'd come and let her look at your hand. She tells you everything—your character, and what's happened in the past, and what's going to happen—and—oh, fancy, she says some trouble is coming to me! She's never been wrong before, and it makes me— Oh—h—h!" She gave a little cry, and set down her tea-cup, holding her left hand over her eyes.

"What is the matter?" I jumped up in a fright.

"The moon! The moon!"

I felt for an instant that her reason had given way.

"Milly, my dear—" I took her hand trembling.

"Why didn't you let down the blind, Geoffrey?" she said. I turned away dazed to pull down the blind.

- "Oh, it's no use now-I've seen it."
- "Seen what?"
- "The new moon, of course, and through glass. Now you see how exactly right that woman always is!" She looked at me almost triumphantly as I came back to my seat.
- "Oh," I said, a good deal relieved, "did she tell you you were going to see the moon through glass?"
- "No, you stupid boy. She said I was going to have some great trouble, and that I was going to be very ill. I come home, and here the first thing that happens is, I see the new moon through glass. It's the most frightful bad luck."
- "I wish you'd put that nonsense out of your head."
- "And—oh dear! oh dear!—I wish you'd just come with me once to Mrs. Sanderson. Why, palmistry's a science, Geoffrey! I could tell you the most wonderful cases of predictions coming true. You shouldn't sneer at things

you don't understand. Heavens! what do you suppose is going to happen?" She lay back in her chair and closed her eyes wearily. "The last time she said I was going to be ill I was, you know—oh, dreadfully, dreadfully ill!"

Of course the prediction was duly verified on this occasion. It became evident in a day or so that my wife's old but very slight weakness of the heart was sensibly increased.

Things didn't mend during the weeks that followed. Dorothy was absorbed by the failing health of her grandmother and the demands of her cousin-guest, and we were never sure of being alone an instant. I lived on crumbs of the coldest comfort; and cheerless as the present was, I dreaded to look a day beyond.

It was on Dorothy's birthday, the 10th of July, that we had a little talk together over some old prints I had brought her.

I was not in the best of spirits, and she noticed it.

"Is anything the matter?" she said, looking up at me as she stood close at my side.

"Nothing very new, I'm afraid."

"I wish I could help you, dear friend; I wish I could help us both."

"Dorothy," I said, on an impulse too strong and sudden to resist, "are you conscious of any change that may be coming to us—through you, I mean—through some alteration—or possible new interest for you?"

She only shook her head.

"Tell me," I whispered—"tell me honestly."

"Dear friend! You don't need me to tell you what you know."

As she glanced up at me with love-lit, won-derful eyes, I saw her lashes were wet. My heart burst into singing. I felt like a condemned man who is reprieved.

I went home saying to myself: "I haven't lost her yet—not yet—not yet!"

In the hall my wife's maid met me. " Madam

is not so well," she said; "will you come to her?"

I ran upstairs. My wife's room was darkened, and as I went in I heard her crying softly among the pillows.

"What's the matter?" I said; "why are you in the dark?" I pulled up the nearest blind. When I came back to her I saw that she was lying prone on the outside of the bed, with her head buried in the clothes, sobbing convulsively.

"What is it?" I said, lifting her up. "Are you in pain?"

I held the thin little figure in my arms a moment, and then laid her down and covered her up.

"You're thoroughly chilled," I said. "What does Watson mean by leaving you like this?"

"I sent her away—I couldn't bear any one near. O Geoffrey, I've seen the new moon the second time through glass." She began to cry weakly again.

"My dear child! What if you have? Come now, I'll bring you a little draught, and you'll see, you'll be all right to-morrow." I rang for Watson, and went downstairs to prepare a sleeping-potion.

When I came back with it I found my wife talking vehemently to Watson, and caught the phrase, "A coffin in the crystal." She stopped as I came in, and the servant went out.

"There!" I said, as I gave my wife the draught. "That will do you all the good in the world."

She shook her head, but drank the medicine off. I couldn't help noticing how haggard and bloodless she was looking. As she handed me back the glass she clutched me by the sleeve.

"Geoffrey," she said, "if I see it the third time—I shall know what it means." She started nervously as the door creaked. It was Watson coming in with the hot-water bottle.

THE next morning found my wife much exhausted and suffering from weak action of the heart. I did not leave her, except to see the patients that came to the house, till she fell asleep late in the afternoon. Then I jumped into a hansom and drove to Mrs. Lance's. I saw the moment I entered the room that the marked improvement in her condition manifested during the last few days was holding its own. She informed me it was not in the least due to the new medicine we had been trying, but to the tonic of her growing conviction that, if her life were spared, she would bring about the marriage that she had come to regard as a vital condition of the world's continuing prosperity.

"Yes, yes! I'm marvellously better these last few days," she said, "and I'll tell you what it's put into my mind. We'll take our outing in Switzerland this year. It will be good for Dorothy."

"For—for Miss Lance?" I said, with a sinking heart. "And you won't feel nervous at being so far out of my reach?"

"Ah, that's the very point. We'll time our trip so that you can come too. You take your holiday soon, don't you?"

"Yes, but much as I'd like-"

"Come, come now, I'll take no denials. We'll go to Fichtenberg. I know the very chalet we'll have."

"No, thanks—it's quite impossible. My wife is too much out of health for me to leave."

"Bring your wife with you."

"I don't think that could be managed," I said. But still we discussed the matter, and I saw that, whether I went or not, Mrs. Lance was bent on carrying out her scheme. She let fall sundry remarks about Dorothy needing a change—about "young people" and "walks" and "excursions." I saw it all plainly enough, and went downstairs in no very enviable frame

of mind. Dorothy was standing at the drawing-room door waiting for me. She looked up smiling, but anxious, I thought, with her finger to her lips. She came forward as I reached the bottom of the stairs.

"Sh! Donald's smoking in the billiardroom," she whispered, beckoning me to follow her to the drawing-room.

"Billiard-room!" I echoed, "I didn't know you had one."

"Oh yes, my father always used it. Grand-mamma's just had it cleared out and repaired."

She shut the door cautiously behind us.

"For Captain M'Kay, I suppose?"

"Yes. Sit down." She wheeled "my" chair out of a corner.

"Mrs. Lance is very considerate of Captain M'Kay," I said, with not a tithe of the bitterness I felt.

"Grandmamma has a craze for him just at present. How long it is since we had a quiet

word together!" She sat in a low chair beside me, looking up with her cheek supported on her hand.

"Yes," I said moodily, "thanks to Captain M'Kay."

"Captain M'Kay doesn't deserve all our thanks," she returned, with quick emphasis. I started slightly.

"Dorothy! You've never spoken like that before."

"No, no! Forgive me, dear friend." As she dropped her head between her hands I saw her eyes were full of tears. I put out my hand to touch her hair, and drew it suddenly back.

"Shall I tell you what I sometimes regret most of all?" she said, through her fingers.

"What?"

"That you and I are so disgustingly good."

"Do you think we're good enough to bother about?" I said drearily.

"Quite good enough to spoil our lives," she said, lifting her head suddenly, "and our characters too, I sometimes think."

"What has come over you, Dorothy?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'm not myself to-day
—or else I've not been myself before. I don't
know which it is, I'm sure." She dropped her
head into her hands again.

"Dear!" I said. I laid my hand on her shoulder. She jumped up almost fiercely.

"Please don't touch me," she said, and went over to the window with her handkerchief to her eyes. She came back almost at once and sat down in another chair farther from me.

"Of course it isn't our fault, or anybody else's fault, that we are what we are, and that Fate is against us. Though I told my grand-mother this morning, when she said I wasn't like other girls, that that was the concern of my ancestors and my training, and that if I wasn't satisfactory, somebody owed me an apology."

We were silent for a moment or two. Then I said, thinking out loud, as I often did with her:

"I sometimes believe we're all just alike except in discretion."

Dorothy looked up.

"We are all alike," I went on, "except in the account we give of ourselves. I am as conceited as Captain M'Kay, but my conceit is so great it hurts me to brag. I am as selfish as anybody you please, but so selfish that I long to appear capable of abnegation. I could accuse myself of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me; but that is not the account my discretion gives of me to the world. I go about with the label 'excellent fellow' on my back, and old ladies put their trust in me. A kind of decent shame prevents one from undressing in the marketplace; but under their clothes, men are all of one general pattern."

"Then you think you and I are not so good after all?" She was looking at me with curious eyes.

"Not really; but we are bound to behave as if we were. There is an old habit in our blood that constrains us to conform." I had got up, remembering the moment after, with ironic self-realisation, that it was the thought of my wife in the background of my mind that was cutting my visit short. "We can't help ourselves," I said, taking her hand. "We had miserable hair-splitting ancestors, with never an honest rogue among them."

"You don't think the thought of my grandmother should give me courage?" the girl said, with an audacious lifting of the chin.

"I'm afraid not," I answered. "Mrs. Lance is evidently a sport, and you're the product of a remoter atavism." I went away without mentioning Switzerland, though it had not been a moment absent from the thoughts of both.

My wife was lying in a kind of stupor when I got back. I felt her pulse and took her temperature, and questioned Watson.

The case was baffling, but not at all without precedent. I stood by the window looking out and thinking. Was she going to die? She almost certainly would, if she were not roused out of this morbid state. Before I could control my vagrant thoughts, they carried me swiftly past a series of pictures of her decline, until in imagination I stood looking into her coffin saying triumphantly, "Released! Released!" thinking not at all of the dead, but vividly, poignantly of the living. A movement from the invalid jostled me back against reality, and I shuddered to think where I had allowed myself to stray. As I looked across at her bloodless face on the pillow, the hollow eyes opened and seemed to look speechless reproach at me. I could hardly have felt

guiltier if she had caught me pouring poison into her glass. I went downstairs to my study and tried to read. I went over the same paragraph a dozen times. The words conveyed no meaning.

"If you were a scoundrel, now," something kept saying in my ears, "you would need only to sit quite still, just as you're doing."

Good God! I thought, this is the way crime is born! I flung down my book and ran upstairs.

"Milly," I said breathlessly, when I reached the bedside, "how would you like to go to Switzerland with me for our holiday?"

She turned her head suddenly and looked at me with amazement.

"I go to Switzerland! Don't be so absurd and heartless! How can I travel half over Europe when I can't cross the room?"

"Oh, but that's only because you've been in London too long. Mountain air is what you need."

"I haven't the strength for such a journey."

"You don't need strength. You shall be carried, and we'll go soon. I'll write to Seton Smith and see if he can't take up my work. Now get better as soon as you can. Before the week's out we'll be in Fichtenberg. Yes, we will, if I have to carry you all the way."

She smiled and shook her head.

"I used to like Switzerland," she said.

So it was that we anticipated Mrs. Lance and her party, and after an unspeakably wearisome journey were installed at the big Pension on the outskirts of Ober-Fichtenberg, two days before the arrival of the others.

It was a rambling old structure that had been a private house. In some period of former prosperity as a summer resort it had acquired a huge modern wing. But so few people patronised the place now, we wondered how the proprietor made the establishment pay.

We had front rooms looking out on the cliff, where a little above us, under a great ledge of rock, the peaked and gabled Chalet Höhheim had been built, and dedicated to the use of invalids, who were said to prosper greatly in that sheltered nook. But the place was inaccessible and expensive to keep up, and Fichtenberg little known. Often for years at a stretch the chalet was tenantless.

From our sitting-room my wife and I watched the lights spring up in the windows opposite, on the first night of Mrs. Lance's arrival. "How much more cheerful it will be now," Millicent said. "Did you tell me she was better?"

- "Oh, wonderfully!"
- "And her granddaughter?"
- "She's always well."
- "I watched you just now when you went

out to meet them," my wife went on. "I thought the old lady seemed rather brusque and ungracious."

"Oh, she was a little put out at our coming away on such short notice. She wanted us to travel with her."

"And why didn't we?"

"I thought it would be best for you to get away as soon as possible. Besides, I didn't want you to hurry the journey. They've come straight through."

"I thought I knew how good you were, Jiffy, but I didn't know half until I got so ill."

"Nonsense," I said. I got up and watched the lights over the way flitting about as if an inspection were in progress. They all disappeared presently except the one in the window in the gable.

"Stand a little to one side, Jiffy; you never seem to think I might like to see too."

I obeyed.

The blind in the high gable window above us drew up and Dorothy looked out into the dusk. She saw me and smiled, and waved her hand. I think I returned her salute stiffly. She disappeared, but the candles were left burning. Through the square of yellow light we could see into the room.

"I was surprised to see how pretty she is," said my wife. "Who was the tall sunburnt man?"

- "Captain M'Kay, Mrs. Lance's niece's son."
- "Are they engaged or anything?"
- "Not that I know of. Why?"
- "Oh, I don't know. I believe they will be if they're not. You'll see. Shut the window, Geoffrey; you'll have me catching cold."

I VISITED Mrs. Lance in the morning and found her more amiable; perhaps because she was less well after her foolhardy journey, and

remembered my former usefulness. Dorothy sat by her grandmother's side. She was looking her most radiant, and yet a little wistful at times, I thought.

"I've been telling Dorothy she must go over and see your wife, Dr. Monroe," said Mrs. Lance.

"Oh, thanks, you are very kind. Mrs. Monroe is very much fatigued by the journey, and I'm afraid is hardly able to see any one at present." And mentally I decided that as soon as she was better we would go to Laach, which was near enough for me to visit my old patient, and not near enough for social complications.

"Grandmamma and Cousin Donald have taken the rooms on the sheltered side," said Dorothy. "I'm the only Spartan in the party. I have the gable room and the one next door. My sitting-room is delightful. I certainly have the best view," and she looked in my face with gentle significance.

"Aren't you and Donald going to walk?" asked the old lady. "You needn't wait on my account, you know. Send Williams to me."

Not attempting to conceal her unwillingness—and I blessed her for that—Dorothy got up and left us with a nod of good-bye, and a speech of rebellion against the necessity of walking one's legs off, just because one was in Switzerland.

But in spite of this little profession of faith intended for me, Dorothy was out all day and every day, as it seemed to me, tramping about with her cousin.

I said something of the sort on the first occasion of my seeing her alone for any length of time after our arrival. We were to have tea in Dorothy's sitting-room, whither I had been brought to see the view.

"Well, you see grandmamma is always planning outings for Donald and me," Dorothy said, "and I'm constrained a little (why shouldn't I admit it?) by the nearness of your wife. I can't say how glad I was to get her message that she was too weak to see strangers. And still I seem to live under her eye. I realise her as I never did before. She is well avenged for my long obliviousness of her exis-She is terribly alive, terribly real to me Remember, I've never seen her in my life, and yet I can't look out of my window but I feel her eyes are on me. When I go out or come in with Donald, she is watching us, I think, and I'm glad she sees me with him. If I stop to speak to you, I feel that in my mere 'Good-morning' she will read a history four years long, and cry out upon us. The whole front of your hotel palpitates with her; every window is an eye, every sound is her voice, and I start and listen like a thief in hiding. I feel now that any moment that door may open, and she may stand there looking at me, and saying, 'Why do you take my husband from me?'"

I dropped my head in my hands. "Oh! it's a difficult world, my friend, and it isn't any easier since this morning."

"What has happened?" I said, without looking up.

"Donald has—yes, he's beginning to ask questions—"

"Questions?"

"Yes, grandmamma too. We had a very painful scene this morning."

"About-"

" Yes."

"Why don't you settle the matter for ever by plainly speaking your mind?—about your cousin, I mean. After all, you're a free agent."

"No," she smiled sadly. "And I'm always so afraid they'll find out that I'm not free. This morning grandmamma said: 'I could almost believe you've got a foolish infatuation for some one else!"

We sat silent awhile.

- "If the worst came to the worst—" the girl began.
  - "Yes?"
- "If my life with my grandmother became unendurable—"
- "Well—you would tell me, and we would see what—"

She shook her head.

"No, I should only go away and be alone for a while."

Her not reckoning with me, as it were, her setting me aside, sent a sudden anguish through my blood.

- "If anything happened," I said, controlling my feeling as best I could, "we would take counsel together."
  - "No, dear friend."
  - "What do you mean?"
- "I should know without asking what your counsel, or, at least, what your feeling would be."

"How could you know of me what I don't know of myself?"

"You know, at all events, you would never forget the barrier between us." Her voice was low and toneless. "You know that all the ways are barred." The resignation in her face seemed on the instant a disloyalty. But I could not find my tongue. "We must try to be as reasonable as we can," she said dully. "We must accept our lives as we find them. You are better at acceptance than I." Then she laughed a little—drearily, very drearily.

"You are quite clear, apparently"—I found myself saying—"remarkably clear in your estimate of me."

She followed with her eyes as I got up and walked the length of the room and back.

"What's in the air to-day?" said the girl.
"There's something I haven't heard before in your voice, and a quite new look in your face."

"Is there? That's very reprehensible. A man should always be exactly the same." I could not have accounted for the sudden sense of bitterness that overwhelmed me. Dorothy was keenly conscious of the jar, and, woman-like, she tried to drop her own bitterness out of sight, the better to help me to banish mine.

"Of course no one can always be the same," she said, "but it's a comfort sometimes to think how steadfast a thing instinct is—how absolutely safe we are in depending on certain characters following certain lines."

"That's a dangerous dependence. It might easily turn out a broken reed."

She shook her head. Instead of soothing, her confidence stung me.

"No," she went on unmoved; "I know as well as if I had the gift of prophecy what you would do and say under given circumstances."

"I can only repeat I don't know myself one tenth so well."

"But I do," she said almost perversely. "I would stake my life on your generosity—your patience—"

"Don't twit me with my patience," I said passionately, half under my breath. "Oh, forgive me; I don't know what I'm saying." She had started, but was looking at me with a quietness that still pricked me on.

"You surely don't mind my saying that it would be unlike you to—"

"Unlike me? What is like me? Do you think a man is like a jar of acid or of salt, with its immutable label, and its fixed and warranted effect? Indeed, it seems to me it would be safer to count on his being an entire laboratory—full of poisons and their antidotes, and subtle combinations of things never mixed before. You may run your mind's eye along the hidden shelves"—I stopped before her in my walk—"and you'll find nothing lacking. I have the world within me! You

have thought there was nothing here but kindness and good faith, patience and honour; but I assure you, you are wrong. There is something of every passion under the sun."

"And yet you are Geoffrey Monroe, and not another man. There are things possible to your neighbours that are for ever impossible to you."

"How is one to know what is possible or what is not? No one is a thief before he has considered theft or faced the possibility of stealing. My life for a long time brought to the surface what you're pleased to call the good qualities—but to say of any natural human act or feeling that it's 'impossible' to me is to call me something less or more than a man. 'Unlike me?'—there is no 'me.' I am fifty people. I am patient and I am intolerant, wise and silly, loving and full of hate, indolent and raging with energy, trustful and suspicious, loyal and treacherous. All, all that human na-

ture has found possible, or has to learn—the germ of it all is here."

"And yet"—the girl's voice sounded in my ears like Fate—"and yet—it will be the full-grown, practised habit of mind that will govern in the end. The strongest thing will rule."

"Yes, but what is strongest? There are surprises in the answer to that question."

"Not for you and me."

"You think not?"

"I am sure not."

"You mean you are sure nothing will ever be stronger in me than"—I spoke blundering and with difficulty—"than the need to accept —and—and—respond to old—obligations?"

She nodded gravely, looking straight out before her.

"Does that disappoint you?"

She only shook her head.

"Would you"—I began again, a sick fear pulling at my heart—"would you have me try

to feel differently—would you be ready to help me?"

- "Heaven forbid!"
- "Why?" but I was breathing freer again.
- "Because you would never succeed in feeling differently."
  - "You think not?"
- "I am sure." Still she sat there statue-like, looking across through the window to the snow-fields. "Neither you nor I am afraid of breaking a man-made law"—she spoke with a low-pitched monotonous cadence—"we are both of us afraid of breaking a heart"—only her pale lips moved. "We are afraid most of all of ourselves, and what we would think of ourselves."

Neither spoke for a moment—then I:

"So it's only a form of refined selfishness; we are pleasing ourselves in some sorry fashion—"

"We are doing what we must do, and from that there's no escape. Hush! here comes Donald." She rang for tea. "Please stay a little while. It will look odd if—"

Her cousin walked in with the air of one who enters his own house. For once this man, and the side of the problem touching him, seemed remote to insignificance. But I roused myself to the task of seeming to regard him as before.

- "How d'you do?" he said, surprised at seeing me there.
- "How d'you do?" Conversation languished while the tea was brought in.
- "Have you been to the top of the Weisshut yet?" I said.
- "Yes, since luncheon—just come back. Very decent climb. You ought to have come along," he said, looking at Dorothy.
- "I walked so far this morning," answered the girl, "I felt tired."
- "It would have freshened you up. If you'd gone with me, you wouldn't have looked as

tired as you do now"—which seemed to me an impertinent observation. After all, Captain M'Kay did very sensibly affect the outward situation.

"I don't believe in overdoing it just because one is in Switzerland," I said. "It's a long pull to the top of the Weisshut."

Again there was a moment's silence.

How this fellow disliked me! He couldn't help showing it in every movement.

"Awfully jolly dress you've got on to-day," he said, looking at his cousin as he passed my cup.

"You like this?" She glanced down at her frock.

"Yes, stunning!" I felt myself raging inwardly at the familiarity of his inspection, as his eyes roved leisurely up and down Dorothy's figure. His nonchalance, too, was beginning to irritate me, as it had done many a time in London. Did he often have tea in Dorothy's sitting-room? I had never been there before.

"I'm glad you don't go in for those floppy loose things," he added, still exploring the girl's figure with his bold eyes.

I remembered suddenly that I had never seen Dorothy except in close-fitting bodices, any more than for many years I had been accustomed to see my wife in anything but a flowing gown.

- "I loathe tea-gowns," Dorothy was saying.
- "Do you? Why, I wonder?" I asked.
- "Oh, such untidy things. A woman should fight against tea-gowns to her latest breath."
- "Now, I rather like them," I said, for something to say, and because the Captain didn't.
- "I suppose you get used to seeing people look like invalids?" he said.
- "Hundreds of perfectly healthy women wear them in England," I said stiffly. "Isn't it so, Miss Lance?"

"Well, I don't know. I look upon it as a sign of weakness. There's something flabby in the mind or the body of the woman addicted to tea-gowns."

"Just what I say," said the Captain.

It was not the first time that Dorothy had, quite innocently, stumbled on some characteristic of my wife, with loathing and objurgation. These trifles had their share in showing up the congenital difference in the two women.

"I see now, Dr. Monroe, why you once admired my ivory satin. The one you said—" She broke off suddenly, giving me a swift look. We both remembered the evening before Captain M'Kay arrived (one of our red-letter recollections), when she had worn that gown, and I had told her I never yet had seen her so beautiful.

"You've never told me before that I was pretty," she had said, a little wistfully.

"No one will ever call you anything so com-

monplace," I had answered. "You are beautiful, very—very beautiful—"

"Which is the gown Dr. Monroe approves?" Captain M'Kay was saying lazily, as he stirred his second cup of tea.

"Oh, a white Empire dress, waist up here."

Dorothy put her hands under her breast. A servant came in.

"Mrs. Lance has sent down word that, if Dr. Monroe hasn't gone yet, she would like to see him for a moment—there's no hurry—after tea, she says."

Dorothy turned to me with a smile.

"We give you no peace. But you must have your second cup." She poured out the dregs of my first. "Grandmamma was saying this morning that you were the best friend she had found in the world. All the rest of us were poor creatures. She was very emphatic, and informed Williams and me that you were a very

good man." She smiled, and handed me the cup.

"How little she knows!" I said, thinking how odd it was that this acute old Pagan should have fallen into the common error.

"My grandmother is a very wise old woman—" Dorothy nodded her head sagely.

"Yet even she has lapses, you see."

"You are modest, Dr. Monroe," said Captain M'Kay superciliously.

"It's conducive to modesty to come to the conclusion Miss Lance and I reached some weeks ago."

"What is that?"

"That we are all extraordinarily like our neighbours."

Dorothy threw me a quick appealing glance.

"I'm happy to say the resemblance doesn't strike me," drawled M'Kay.

"But just before you came in," said Doro-

thy, in pursuit of peace, "we were agreeing that, in spite of our all having the same things inside us, the proportions differed, and that varied the result."

"I admit the variation, at all events," said her cousin.

I opened my lips to speak, and Dorothy interrupted, as if she knew I was about to say something not calculated to soothe the Captain.

"What strikes me as stranger than the discovery of unsuspected deeps in human nature—what is far more wonderful—is the very fair estimate that we generally make of people."

"Oh, you think we do our fellows justice, do you?" As I spoke I laughed, and Captain M'Kay crossed his legs aggressively.

"I mean," Dorothy persisted, "that while little things are often wrongly interpreted, in the long run a person's life and character get fair judgment as a rule. For a time you see an impostor taking people in, but it doesn't last." "I should say it frequently did last," said M'Kay gruffly. "It's only the ones that get found out that furnish your examples; the others, the fellows that keep dark—"

"No, no! That's just what I mean. There's less successful 'keeping dark' than sounds credible when you think how many ways there are of conscious and unconscious deceit. There's a kind of rough justice ruling the world. People find their level."

Captain M'Kay set down his cup and walked to the window. He could not have told me plainer in words that he considered my visit sufficiently prolonged. Dorothy, after a little pause, went on as if make talk she must at all hazards.

"It's hard enough to make one's self understood, but still I believe the essence of character is expressed little by little—gets squeezed out by the pressure of circumstances, and comes to be recognised. That's the real miracle. When it's so hard to pick one's way among motives, and so easy to misjudge, how strange that, after all, we should get a right impression in the main! Something of the real person sinks through all the layers of false report and self-misrepresentation, and discovers us the man."

"What makes you so philosophical all of a sudden, Dorothy?" M'Kay turned impatiently from the window.

"Is that what you call it?" she smiled.
Yes, she was looking tired.

He came and stood behind her chair with his hands in his pockets.

"You never talk like that when we're alone."

"It's plainly my evil influence," I said. He had turned away, pulled up a low chair to her side, and sat down.

"I'm trying to get my aunt and cousin to make up their minds to come to Scotland next month," he said, looking straight at me for the first time since greeting me on his entrance. "Don't you think Scotland might do them good?"

"It might," I answered, with a calmness I marvelled at.

"No, no! The journey would be too much for grandmamma," said Dorothy.

"She doesn't agree with you. You'll see she'll have her own way, just as she did about this Switzerland business." He stooped and picked up the fringe of Dorothy's sash that lay trailing on the floor. It was a soft Indian-silk thing that was wound round her waist, and fell in long ends to her feet.

"Glad I was inspired to bring you this," he said, still playing with the fringe. "It suits you particularly."

I stood up.

"I'm forgetting Mrs. Lance," I said, and made my adieux.

"If grandmamma—she as good as promised

me not to speak of the matter again, but if she should mention Scotland—"

- "Well?"
- "Please discourage her-please forbid it."
- "I doubt if Dr. Monroe finds his veto of any use," said M'Kay.
- "You may trust me to make it as effective as I can," I said to the girl, and went out.

MRS. LANCE did not mention Scotland.

When I got home my wife was asleep. I sat down and wrote Dorothy: "Be sure you tell me before you do anything or promise anything irrevocable. I must see you, and not for five minutes—for an hour at least. Where? When? Let it be soon.—G. M."

Why did I want to see her? What should I find to say? Wasn't it all up with me! Why did I struggle so desperately in a vain cause? Why does a drowning man catch at straws?

Pah! What fine names we give mere instinct!

The next day, Tuesday, towards evening, as I was coming home from a walk, I met Dorothy and her cousin about a mile from the village.

We all walked on together for a bit, and then Dorothy suddenly stopped, put her hand to her throat, and said, "Oh, my scarf! I left it in that glen by the big rock. Do you mind, Donald—will you—"

"Oh, of course," he said, and turned back at once.

"We'll wait here," Dorothy called after him. She stood leaning against a tree, poking the pine needles with her light alpenstock, until her cousin was out of sight.

"There's a Fackeltanz in the town on Thursday night," she said at last, looking up; "some feast or other, and the whole place will be decorated and illuminated. I'm supposed to be going down to Nieder-Fichtenberg to see it,

with Donald and some friends of his that will be here by then. At the last moment I'll invent some excuse, have a headache or something, and stay at home."

"I understand, and I'll come over to see you as soon as—"

"When the others are safely out of the way and the household quiet, I'll hang up a little lantern I found the other day. I'll hang it out of the gable window. If anybody sees it, it will be taken for an attempt at illumination, but you'll understand it means 'Come.'" She smiled the whispered invitation at me with a significance she was far from realising.

"Captain M'Kay won't go when he sees you backing out."

"He'll have to. He has asked a party of people over here from Kaltheim to dine with us at Laach. If anything goes wrong you won't see the lantern, that's all." I nodded.

"Aren't you tired after your long walk? Why don't you sit down?" I said.

"He won't be five minutes, unless he misses the footpath." She looked towards the thicket where Captain M'Kay had disappeared. But she dropped down on the pine needles, and set her straight back against the tree. I stretched myself out at her feet.

"What a glorious day it has been!" Dorothy said, taking off her little cloth cap and looking up through the trees.

"Has it?" I said.

She came down from the clouds. As she met my eyes she flushed a little.

"I admit it's warm walking. Why don't you take off your cap?" she said.

"Why should I?"

"I like you with it off."

"Why?"

"I want to look at your hair."

- "What's the matter with it?"
- "There's nothing the matter. I like seeing it."
  - "You must tell me why."
- "Well, you're making me very personal, but it isn't my fault."
  - "Go on."
- "I noticed your hair the very first thing after your six feet and your shoulders. It grows so prettily."
  - "That's very satisfactory."
  - "Oh, it's much more. It's unique."
  - "Really?"
- "Yes. Did you never notice how few people's hair fits them?"
  - "Can't say I have."
- "Well now, just think of it. It's rarer than a good nose. Think of poor Captain M'Kay. His hair is like a badly cut wig that has slipped back an inch." We laughed with infinite zest. "The reason that so many women wear their

hair plastered over their eyes is because it fits their foreheads so badly that they have to cover up as much as possible."

I found myself visualising my wife's smooth and carefully dressed head. Again I thought: It's like carved pine; and I looked up at Dorothy. "How about your hair?" I said.

"Oh, mine's a perfect fit," she laughed. "But you would never have known it if I hadn't dexterously led the conversation that way." She leaned forward to see if Captain M'Kay was in sight.

"Doesn't the weight of your hair ever make your head ache?"

"No. What a notion!"

"You have a great deal."

"That's a sign of strength. Sickly people have poor, thin hair. If I were to get ill my hair would fall out. The story of Samson is very good symbolism. The seat of strength is in the hair."

I laughed.

"Perfectly true," she insisted, smiling. "The hair is a reservoir of electricity. You ought to see how mine snaps and sparkles if I brush it in a dark room in the winter."

"I should be delighted to see it in a dark room."

"Never mind if I am Irish. You know what I mean. Men of an effete race lose their hair early. You never yet saw a very strong person who had thin dead-looking hair. Now did you?"

I didn't answer at once. I was wondering if she would ever see my wife.

"Has anything more been said about Scotland?" I asked.

"No, thank heaven! Don't let us think about it."

I watched a black spider picking his way over the needles. "He's making for you," I said, instinctively expecting to hear a scream. Dorothy held out a dry twig to turn the little creature's course. But he climbed the obstacle, and kept on in her direction. She presented the twig again.

"Donald is a goose about knowing his way in the woods. I'm sure he hasn't found the short cut to the glen."

"You are very impatient to have him back."
She looked up at me and smiled. It was an eloquent enough denial.

"Why do you oppose the good intention of that insect?"

"How do you know he has good intentions?"

"Has your education been so neglected you don't know it's good luck to have a spider come towards you?"

"Is it?" she laughed. "Then I prefer to be unlucky. Go back, you beast." She at last succeeded in discouraging his advances. He made off to one side.

- "Are you afraid of him?"
- "No, but he's not pretty."
- "What is your pet superstition?"
- "I'm afraid I haven't one—except believing through thick and thin that things will turn out all right."

She leaned back and looked up through the pine branches.

"Oh, but it's a day out of Paradise," she said softly, drawing in a long breath. "How glorious it would be if you and I—"

"If you and I—?" But she only smiled, still looking up.

It suddenly flashed over me what was the inner meaning, the physical basis, as it were, of the charm this woman cast over me. It was the spell of superb health. I had known women whose beauty was more rare, more arresting to the first glance, but I had never known a human being more sound and sane than the woman before me. Her very cleverness was of the

wholesome, home-grown kind. There was nothing in it forced or exotic, or out of the norm.

All my life at home and abroad I had been fighting Disease. Here was a creature crowned and glorified by victory in the battle I had seen lost by day and by night for twenty years. It seemed to me, thinking back, that I had looked on nothing but defeat all my days, until that morning when I first saw Dorothy Lance.

I looked again at the easy pose of her strong young body—the slim waist, not pinched nor too hardly outlined, the generous breast, the shoulders well set back, the strongly shod and shapely feet thrust out from under the Alpine frock, the slender ankles, the look of supple grace through all the figure, the kind of grace no art can counterfeit—and I said to myself, "This is the sort of creature our labour and our science are striving to make the type."

"Penny for your thoughts," she said, dropping her chin and looking at me. "I wish you wouldn't say that," I answered, on an impulse.

"Why not?"

It was very idiotic. My only reason was that the phrase was often on the lips of my wife. "Oh, it doesn't sound like you. But I was thinking—"

"Yes?"

To myself I said, "Thinking you should be the mother of sons"—aloud:

"Thinking how iniquitous it was that I should be condemning you to perpetual maidenhood."

"Geoffrey!" It was a curious, passionate intonation—like a protest, like a prayer. She had never called me by my name before. I felt as if she had kissed me on the mouth.

"We settled all that long ago," she said in the pause. "You are not thinking that I—that I—" I waited. "You don't think I would give up my right to love you for all the other good things in life—do you?"

"What are the other good things, Dorothy?"
"Home and children, I suppose." She was

looking straight before her through the forest. As I watched her I saw the tears gather in her eyes. Ah yes! we had been thinking the same thought, my love and I.

As she shifted her position on the pine-needle bed, a roughness in the bark of the tree she leaned against caught her hair. She struggled a moment to free herself.

"Shall I help you?" I said, getting up.

"No, no, please," she said earnestly. With upraised arms she tried to pull the hair free. I lay down in my former position and watched her. She took out several hairpins and threw them in her lap. I saw she was making matters worse. I drew myself nearer and put up my hand to help.

"No, no, I'll do it myself," she said hur-

riedly, and wrenched herself away by main force. The action brought a twitch of pain to her face. She laughed a little ruefully.

"It's all right now."

"All right!" I said indignantly. "You've hurt yourself horribly." She shook her head, and the loosened hair came tumbling about her shoulders like a mantle. She gathered it up hurriedly and twisted it into a great rope. I handed her the hairpins. She took them gingerly. It almost seemed as if she were at pains not to touch my fingers.

"Lean forward," I said, when she had put in the last pin. She did as I asked, looking back over her shoulder. Two or three tangled hairs were clinging to a low-growing twig. I untwisted them gently, with a sense that I would hurt her if I were not careful. When they were freed, I laid the little tangled skein in my note-book.

"How quiet we are!" said Dorothy, in a half-

whisper, looking from me to the lock as it lay in my book.

- "I could have saved you this," I said.
- "Then you wouldn't have had it."
- "If you'd let me untangle it-"
- "Oh, I've plenty left."
- "Why wouldn't you let me help you?"
- "I thought I could do it myself."
- "No, you didn't."
- "What do you mean?"
- "You were afraid," I whispered.
- "Afraid?" she echoed under her breath.
- "Yes, you are afraid to let me come near you. You are afraid to let me touch you."

We looked into each other's faces till she dropped her eyes. Something crackled in the wood. I stood up. The moment after Captain M'Kay came striding through the trees.

"Well, Donald, did you lose your way again?"
Dorothy said, as he came up to us.

How I hated to hear her call him Donald!

I GOT through the next day somehow, and Thursday, the last day of the old life, dragged itself towards evening.

Millicent had suffered from one of her headaches ever since breakfast. I found my own head beginning to throb and swim after sitting all the long bright afternoon in the darkened room beside her.

Once I got up and went into the sittingroom to breathe the fine mountain air at the
half-open window, to look at the eternal hills,
to watch the window in the chalet over the
way. Was Dorothy sitting in that pretty
room of hers with her stupid cousin? What
was she looking like as he pressed his suit?
Was he close beside her there, stroking the
fringe of her scarf? What was he daring to
say to her? What was she thinking? How
was it going to end? Why had I asked for an
interview? There was nothing to say. Noth-

ing-nothing! I leaned my forehead against the window-frame, and my spirit went headlong down into that nameless abyss where men's souls are racked and tortured out of their reason -out of their humanity. Why should I go on weakly suffering? I groaned. I had not been half so much cursed by untoward—outward circumstance as I had been by cowardice. I hadn't the courage to be true to my love. I hadn't enough common honesty to stop lying. I hadn't the nerve to outrage conventionality. Dorothy loved me well enough (I believed it even in that black hour) to go away with me. I had enough to provide for my wife and to live on besides. If I let things drift, Dorothy would be harassed into marrying her cousin, and—I set my teeth.

Really Fate was in the Devil's own mood when she measured my life's portion out. Now if I had had an unfaithful wife I might squeeze some excuse for myself out of the situation. If

she ate opium, or drank, or even were a shrew! But no, the tragedy was much less obvious and popular. It was summed up in the fact that I had not met the woman I could love with all the strength of my body and soul until I had been married fifteen years.

It was not as if my present life made any one happy, I reasoned, groping still in that pit of blackness. - My wife had forgotten the art of being glad. Life would be much the same to her if I were dead. She would still have her nurses and her comforts about her, her novels and her palmists and fortune-tellers, her evil prophecies to lend a lurid interest to the future, her new moons— "If I see it the third time, I shall know what it means," she had said in London a fortnight ago, with the horror of death in her hollow eyes. What if she should see it the third time? What if, in her present lowered state—? The ugly thought fastened its fangs in me, and I struggled in vain to throw it off. I found myself taking part in a little drama that improvised itself before me like some magic show. I saw myself coming home from a visit to Dorothy. It was half-past five. I would come up the steps of the hotel, I would look back at the chalet, and there, just over the gable, in full view of our sitting-room window, behold the silver sickle shining sharp and clear. I could see myself standing horror-stricken a moment, afraid to come in. Had Millicent seen it? I would come slowly upstairs. Half-way up I would stop to listen, gripping the banisters hard. No crying, no hurrying maids, no sound whatever. "As still as death," I would think, and go in. I would find my wife in her own room looking stronger and brighter than usual. She would be turning over some ribbons and laces. I would go into the sitting-room. The new moon would look in at the window. Had my wife followed me, I would wonder-was she standing horror-stricken at the door? I

would not dare to turn and see. Then suddenly I would think, If she hasn't seen it already she will, unless I prevent it. If I don't draw down that blind— The self within myself grew giddy before the fancied problem. If I should find myself face to face with that situation, would I or would I not draw down the blind? I wrestled with the black uncertainty down there in the pit until my power to think and weigh seemed to desert me. I leaned against the window-frame and shut my eyes. My wife's face, as she looked long ago, rose before me. Ah, how pretty she used to be! No, no! With a sense of jar and horror I stood up. "There's no doubt, no doubt at all," I said to myself, "I would draw down the devilish blind."

Scarcely had I tasted the comfort of this conviction when I said to myself, "Oh, you'd pull down the blind of course, just out of sheer cowardice. You aren't afraid or ashamed to

think any horror, but you haven't got the nerve to carry out your own wishes. In an honester age you'd have settled the matter long ago by dagger or bowl, or open desertion, and paid your penalty like a man. But you—you'll save your wife's life out of mere physical sensitiveness and shrinking of the nerves. That's the cloak that civilisation wraps round honest, old-fashioned violence. So long as its lusty nakedness is hidden, we are content to sing hymns to Progress."

OUT of the depths I heard a voice calling, "Geoffrey! Geoffrey!"

I lifted my head and listened.

"Geoffrey!" It was my wife's voice from the inner room. As I turned to go, Dorothy came to her window with a vase and a bunch of wild flowers. She saw me instantly, and made me a sign. She began to arrange the flowers on the wide window-seat. When she had put in a bunch of columbine or an Alpine rose, she would lift the vase up for my inspection, with a gay little "How-do-you-likethat?" air.

She was dressed in some soft grey stuff, with a crimson jerkin under the outer coat. I was glad she hadn't put on the Indian scarf again. She had a little red cap on her head. She's been out, I thought, as I noticed how her wavy hair was tossed and roughened. The late sunshine slanted into her room, glorifying her as it passed. It touched every pane of glass on that side of the chalet, and turned them all to ruddy fire.

The vase was full. She turned away to put it somewhere in the room. She came back with one spray of white bells left in her hand, and made me a little salute with it. Then she fastened it at her throat, and leaned against the window-frame idly smiling. What does

why does she deck herself out with all her holiday airs, when she knows what I must be suffering; when, if half her professions were true, she would be suffering too? Bah! have women any hearts after all, or are they merely a more or less "fair perdition" to us all? Dorothy had started out of her lazy attitude with a look of alarm. She was staring across at me with frightened eyes. Why, of course, my black looks have startled her. I shook my head and tried to smile. She drew back from the window, and made a little motion beckoning me over.

"Geoffrey!" called the voice from within, this time edged with impatience. "You promised not to leave me."

So I did, I thought, "in sickness and in health, until—" I turned away from the sunset and the vision over the way, and went back into the dark. I sat there till dinner-time.

After dinner, I came up to say good-night. There was only a single candle burning under a shade. Milly was sitting propped against the pillows, still dressed, and with a white shawl round her. The face, that neither years nor ill-health could rob of its delicate purity, was turned expectantly to the door.

"Oh, here you are! You've been away an eternity. Jiffy dear, I'm tired of being here," she said. "You must carry me into the sitting-room."

"Why, it's time you went to bed," I answered, holding my watch near the dim light.

"No; I'm not sleepy, and I'm frightfully nervous. No, I'm not going to take any nasty medicine. All I want is to go into the next room, and you shall sit by me and we'll talk."

"You'd much better go to bed."

She caught sight of the cap I held in my hand. "Oh, were you going to walk?"

"Yes," I said.

- "Geoffrey! I can't be left all alone."
- "Where is Watson?"
- "She's gone to see the illuminations. They're having some kind of festivity down in the town, and I told Watson she might go with Teresa and the rest, and that you'd stay with me. You don't care for illuminations, Jiffy—"
- "I suppose not," I said, vaguely wondering if the lantern were lit in the gable of the chalet.
- "Come, put down your cap and carry me in.

  I feel so shaky to-night I thought I wouldn't
  try to walk."
- "Wait till I get the sofa ready," I said, and I went into the sitting-room. The chalet was dark. I drew down the flimsy white blind, thinking, with a sense of horror, of my waking dream of the early evening. I turned up the electric light, and piled the cushions on the sofa. As I carried Millicent in, she cried out, "Oh, the horrid glare! I think you might re-

member, Geoffrey, how I hate that hideous light. It goes through my head like knives. Put it out, and bring the candle." I laid her down, covered her up, and obeyed, stopping only to say, "I can't read to you, you know, by that one wretched candle."

"Don't want to be read to. I'm nervous and keep thinking horrors. Mimi wants you to talk."

So I brought in the candle and sat down in the uncertain light with my back to the window, thinking doggedly, I'll see if I can't forget the chalet for a while.

- "Just feel my hands, Geoffrey; they're like ice," my wife said. I chafed them slowly.
  - "Geoffrey, what's the day of the month?"
  - "The 1st of August."
  - "How long have we been here?"
  - "Two weeks."
  - "No, surely it's three."
  - "No, two."

- "Jiffy, I'm sure it's longer."
- "Why are you sure? You never know the day of the month."
- "Well, you see, I thought I'd keep count this time for a special reason. And I believe you're mistaken. But I've mislaid my almanac."

We were silent awhile.

- "I told you I felt sure they were either engaged then, or would be soon, didn't I?"
  - "Who's engaged?" I said.
- "Now who is there here to be engaged, except Dorothy Lance? Don't wool-gather, Geoffrey!"
  - " Oh!"
- "Yes, Watson says they're to be married almost at once. Didn't you know?"
- "No, and you can't depend on servants' gossip."
- "I don't see any reason to doubt it. After all, you know, if she's ever going to marry she'd better be about it."

I dropped the hand I had been stroking, and leaned back in my chair.

"It seems foreordained, too," she went on.
"Donald and Dorothy—they go together beautifully, don't they?"

"I suppose they do," I answered.

"I shouldn't wonder, now, if Mrs. Sanderson could have told her years ago that there was a letter D in her hand on the Mount of—"

"For heaven's sake don't talk such rubbish!"

I said, jumping up and making an excuse to adjust the candle-shade.

"How impatient you are, Geoffrey! I wish you wouldn't fly out like that. You forget palmistry is a science."

As I turned back to my seat I saw a gleam of light through the white blind. I stopped short in the middle of the room. It must come from the chalet. I said to myself, "Dorothy is waiting and alone."

"What are you looking at, Geoffrey?" said my wife.

"Oh, nothing," I answered quickly, thinking she might conceivably connect my wanting to go for a walk at this unusual hour with the signal in Dorothy's window, if she should see it. I turned away from the milky gleam and sat down.

My wife was a little in the shadow, but she seemed to be staring straight before her. Was she looking at the light through the curtains? Was she puzzling its meaning out? Or was she merely looking at vacancy, unseeing, unthinking? When she spoke I would know. I would wait. I wished I could see her more clearly. It was uncanny sitting there in the half-light, with that white face staring as if at some phantom over my shoulder. Why didn't she speak? I felt my own voice would sound strange. I dared not break the silence. Was it possible she was asleep? I sat rigidly as if

What would happen if I didn't go at all? Surely Millicent had gone to sleep. I could slip away presently. But she had dropped off very suddenly. Suppose she is dead? I thought, and shivered slightly. But no more than sculptured stone did the white face opposite give sign or sound. The sense of horror deepened about me. Why didn't I speak? Why couldn't I move? What was going on in this darkened room? Where was everybody? The place was as silent as the grave. Only we two were left staring at each other through the gloom.

Suddenly with a little crash the candle-shade and brass holder fell to the ground, and a host of shadows started up with crazy antics, like a troop of devils fleeing before the light. I jumped to my feet with an exclamation, and went across the room with a feeling of relief to put the clumsy contrivance right. I picked it

up off the floor, and turned with it in my hand to look at my wife. She lay there, staring with dilated eyes at the faint light that filtered through the blind-fainter now than before the shade fell down. What did it mean? Then for the first time it flashed through me, "She thinks it's the new moon!" She had seen it for the third time! "Milly!" I rushed across the room and knelt beside her. "Milly, Milly!" I took her cold hands. She turned her face towards me and hid it in my shoulder. "My dear," I began, "it isn't-" I stopped short. Perhaps she knows more than I imagine-Dorothy's servants—Watson—windows opposite she may guess it's a signal. "What's the matter, Milly?" I said, struggling in a coil of conflicting impulses.

She gave a little moan.

"What is it? Are you in pain?"

No answer.

"Milly, tell me what has come over you."

"Don't leave me," she whispered, clinging closer.

"No, no, of course not." That sounds as if she suspected the truth, I parleyed inwardly. But, at the same time, and through everything, I seemed to know that I was perfectly conscious she suspected nothing, and that I was only pretending to myself that I thought she did. I was excusing myself to myself for not undeceiving her. Something of all this rose to the surface, where subconscious thought at last lifts up its drowned white face and calls for recognition.

"Milly," I said, "did you mistake that light in the window for the new moon? It was nothing on earth but a lamp."

- "Dear boy," she said softly.
- "Don't you believe me?" I said.
- "You remembered it was the third time," she said, with a weak little break in her voice.

"Don't you suppose I saw it in your face, dear, when you sat there so long like a stone?"

"But it wasn't-it wasn't the moon at all, I swear it wasn't!" Her closed eyelids quivered slightly. "But look! you shall see for yourself." I ran to the window. As I put my hand on the cord I heard voices across at the chalet. Captain M'Kay's I recognised. A party seemed to be going up the narrow path towards the house. I jerked up the blind. The window in the gable was lampless and black. Dorothy had heard the approaching party before I had, and withdrawn the light. Downstairs at the side of the chalet a shaft of light fell out of an open door. I turned away. My wife was clutching the shawl round her throat, leaning forward and looking through the window with feverish excitement.

"Well? Where's your new moon?" I said, with an attempt at a laugh.

"Hidden under a cloud." She dropped back on her cushions.

"On my word of honour, Milly, it wasn't the moon."

"It wasn't a lamp, dear. Please take me back to bed."

I did so, and sat beside her. I tried by every means in my power to shake her fixed belief. She seemed hardly to hear my arguments and questions.

"Don't you know there won't be a new moon for a week? Answer me," I said at last, almost roughly.

"I saw it," was all I could get out of her.

"But you didn't see it. Rouse yourself and think about it rationally. Where's your almanac?"

"It's mislaid. Watson couldn't find it."

"Well, at any rate, you know when you saw the last new moon."

She shivered.

"Yes, I remember, and this is the third time—through glass."

"But you can't have a new moon oftener than every four weeks. Now listen. You saw the last on the 10th of July."

"Was it? How do you happen to remember?"

"It was—" "Dorothy's birthday," I said to myself; aloud—"It was the day before we made up our minds to come here. I wrote to Seton Smith the next morning, the 11th, to ask him to take charge. Now this is the 1st of August. With the best will in the world we can't have a new moon for you till next week. Now are you satisfied?"

"Dear Geoffrey! You'd say anything to hide the truth from me."

"Milly, I give you my word of honour. You don't think I would lie to you, do you?"

"No, dear. But you can be mistaken. I always get mixed up about dates. Oh dear—"

she sighed out a long, hopeless, feeble breath, and closed her eyes. I felt her pulse—it was scarcely perceptible. I jumped up and rang the bell. The crude sound pierced the empty house, setting my nerves on edge.

"Geoffrey, Geoffrey!" moaned my wife. I waited impatiently. I walked back and forth, and rang again.

"Everybody's gone to the fête," my wife said, in a low despairing voice. I could hardly hear the words. I went into the sitting-room and turned up the light. I opened my medicine-case and hurriedly selected a phial. No glass. I looked all about in vain. "I'll be back in a moment," I said, going into Milly's room to get the candle. Downstairs all was dark, except for the light in the hall. I fumbled about the great dining-room, in the wing, by my feeble candle-gleam. No wine-glasses on the sideboard. Milly hated the great thick tumblers. I opened a cupboard.

I remember distinctly the pinked yellow paper that hung down from the shelves below the rows and rows of glasses. Just as I was taking down a sherry-glass, a bell struck sharply on the silence. Who can that be ringing? I thought. Oh, those Americans, no doubt, on the second floor. But no; they had gone into the village. I remembered their leaving the dinner-table so as to lose nothing of the celebration. I had set the candle on the deep lower shelf, and was looking through the wineglass to see if it was clean. Suddenly it flashed across me that it might have been Milly ringing. I ran upstairs, two steps at a time, with the wine-glass in my hand, and my heart thumping in my body.

"Milly!" I called, when I got to my wife's door. No answer. "She is dead," I said to myself. The first thought that came after was, "Well, she won't complain of the glare now," and I felt my way in the dark to the electric

fixture. I turned up the light. She was lying on the floor by the mantelpiece, under the bell. I lifted her up and carried her to the bed.

"No, she's not dead," I saw in a moment; but so bent on trifles is the mind sometimes in a crisis, that my one concern was that, since she was not dead, she would be vexed now that I'd hurried upstairs without the candle and lit the abhorred electric light. But I caught up the wine-glass and hurried into the sitting-room for the restorative. She was already reviving when I came back and held it to her lips.

- "O Geoffrey, I'm dying!"
- "No, you're not," I said. "You fainted—that was all."
- "Oh, but you've no idea of the horrible feeling I had after you went out. I was sure I was going to die before you got back. I thought I'd never reach the bell. It seemed miles away."

"You'll be all right presently." I held her wrist.

"Geoffrey, how can you go on saying so calmly I'm going to get well, when you know I'm dying?"

"If you make up your mind to die, I may not be able to save you—but if you—"

"Oh, I felt it coming even before I saw the third warning!"

"What's to be done?" I thought, baffled and hopeless, and yet afraid to cease from striving to set her right. If I relaxed my strong endeavours for a moment, I seemed to be tacitly contriving she should die. I had come to feel my honour grappled to her life.

"Milly," I said, "when will Watson get back?"

"Oh, not till late, I should think. She never knows when to come home—" She wandered on about Watson's shortcomings.

"Will you mind being alone for ten minutes?" I said.

"Alone?"

"Yes, not longer than ten or fifteen minutes. You're all right now, and I'll come back and read you to sleep."

"Oh, go if you want to." She turned her face to the wall.

It was a very injured tone, but it was permission. I saw she was in no instant danger.

"Only ten minutes," I repeated, and ran downstairs. I opened the front door. All dark at the chalet. I ran up the steep little path and knocked at the door. How sweet the pungent air was!

"Is Miss Lance at home?" I said to the maid.

"Yes, sir."

"Tell her Dr. Monroe would like to see her, please."

I was shown into the empty drawing-room.

I could hear Captain M'Kay's deep voice and his laugh, as the servant opened some door. Dorothy came running in, tall and fair, and dressed in the gown we, laughing, had called "white samite, mystic, wonderful."

"Dear friend," she almost whispered, giving me her hand. "Donald has brought his party back, and—"

"You must come over to the Schweitzerhof, please," I said, speaking rapidly, "and tell my wife that you had a light in your window this evening."

"Are you mad?" She dropped my hand and drew back.

"No; don't lose a moment, please. Tell her you put the light out when you heard your cousin coming back."

"But, my friend, what are you saying? What has happened?"

"Only that she is ill and not quite responsible. She saw it dimly through a white blind.

She imagines that it was the new moon, and she is superstitious about it. She has been very ill."

"Do you realise you are asking me to tell her I put out a signal?"

"No need to explain. There are illuminations everywhere. Will you come back with me now?"

"Geoffrey, I've never seen your wife. Do you really want me to go to-night?"

A kind of strangeness had come over us. She seemed for the moment as remote as some casual acquaintance. I began to apologise for troubling her.

"Geoffrey," she cried out, "what has happened? Why do you treat me like a stranger? Will I come? Why, I would die for you. Only the thing you asked seemed strange at first. Just think a moment. I was to use this signal to tell you you could come secretly and visit me. I have a fright and withdraw the

signal, and you come, nevertheless, and ask me to make my first visit to your wife for the purpose of telling her what I'd been doing."

"You have only to say you heard she was worse, and came to inquire about her. And bring in the illuminations. Oh, you'll see what to do." I turned nervously to go.

"Geoffrey"—she caught my arm—"how changed you are! You—you—you are not caring less for me?"

"No, no, of course not." She was looking up into my face with beseeching eyes. "No, dear," I said again, with a catch in my breath.

"Dear friend," she said, very low, "don't be formal and strange to me. I can't bear it." She was trembling. I had never seen her so moved. "Think," she went on, pouring out the words in a rapid whisper, "ever since Tuesday I've been dreaming of this evening. I got the people off, and I sat waiting in my own room in a fever of impatience till it was dark

enough to hang the signal out. I put on the white gown that you like, and sat in the dusk behind the lantern, waiting—and dreaming—and caring, dear"—she dropped her head on my arm with a little sob—"caring as I never cared before. And the end is, you come and ask me to go and see your wife and tell her—tell her—" Her grasp tightened on my sleeve.

"Come, be my brave friend and help me."

I laid my hand on her hair, and trembled at the strange rapture of the contact. She lifted up her face.

"You know there's nothing I wouldn't do for you," she said. We stood looking at each other—her breath came in soft pants between red parted lips, her eyes swam into mine. Every fibre of my being yearned towards her.

"God!" I cried, in a horrible anguish of longing and of pain, and we seemed to go down together beneath a flood. I held her in my arms, and we swayed like sea-tangle before

the strong incoming tide. I buried my face in her hair—I kissed her mouth and neck.

"Geoffrey"—she seemed weakly to set her crippled strength against the torrent of my passion—"Geoffrey, Geoffrey—think! after five years—five years of patience and denial—think, think! Let me go before we begin to hate ourselves." She struggled out of my arms.

"It is too late," she said sombrely. I did not try to fit a meaning to her words. I looked at her for a moment standing straight and almost defiant, in her shining white robes under the light, with that new look in her face.

I turned away from her without another word, and found myself out in the piney air, stumbling headlong down the narrow path.

Running along the road to the Schweitzerhof, I saw a bright light flickering through the far windows of the wing.

"Some of them are back from the fête," I thought vacantly.

As I crossed the cobbled court in front of the house, the light fell on a big stone that was sometimes used by people in mounting their horses. Day by day since our arrival I had noticed, as I passed, a rusty horse-shoe lying there. A dozen times I had said to myself, "If that could be seen from Milly's window it wouldn't be there long." The ghost of the old thought flitted before me now as I ran up the steps of the house. It stopped me in the doorway; it turned me back and set me blindly groping about the stone. The horse-shoe seemed to have been removed. I was angry to find some one had been before me.

"Milly would have thought it such good luck," I said to myself, feeling the cobbled ground in the shadow of the stone. I was conscious of a dreary pleasure when I grazed my wrist against the symbol in the dark. I snatched up the heavy spiked old shoe and ran upstairs, leaving the front door wide open.

The flood of electric light half blinded me as I burst into Milly's room. She was lying just as I had left her, with tired open eyes.

"Was I long?" I said.

"Oh, everything's long. Life's long—dying's long—" She broke off. "But I've been thinking, Geoffrey."

"Yes?" I had laid down the horse-shoe unobserved. I began to feel ashamed of having brought the dirty thing into the house.

"I'm afraid, dear, I've been a trial to you sometimes. You're so good and kind, and I haven't been as conscious of it as I ought to have been—but things get clearer at the last."

"Hush, hush!—you must think of nothing but getting well. You'll have years and years to consider all your other affairs."

"Geoffrey, I wish you'd come and kiss me."

I bent over her and she lifted up her face. "You haven't kissed me, Jiffy, for a long, long time." She pressed her face against me. The

sensation returned upon me of Dorothy's body warm in my arms, and the touch of her lips as I kissed them again and again, without appeasing my strong need.

"Jiffy." The weak voice brought me to myself. "I think people who are not taken unawares, those who are warned, ought to say 'Thank you!' like a well-mannered guest, before they go. Dear, you've been so good to me. You've never done anything but kindness to me all our lives."

She put her hand on mine.

"Hush, hush!" I said hoarsely.

"Why hush? Won't you be glad afterwards to know that I lay here the night before I died, thinking over all the years we've spent together—and that I told myself you hadn't given me a single memory in all that time that I couldn't say 'Thank you' for? Is that such a little thing?" She smoothed my hair as I sat with bent head, silent. "Why, dear, I'd rather

have that said to me at the last," she went on, "than any glory or great honour." I tried to speak, but my throat was dry. "And next to having deserved to hear it from my husband"—her changed voice kept crooning on —"I should choose that I might say it to him. Doesn't it make you happy, Jiffy, to think how good you've been to me all these years?"

"I've not been good to you," I said.

"Yes, you have, dear; but I know how people feel, good people like you, when any one near them dies. They forget all the kindness they showed, and they remember or else invent some slight or some—something that hurts them looking back. Well, dear, you'll have nothing to be sorry for—you must remember that I said—"

"Milly," I interrupted, hurrying across the room, "I forgot to show you something I found for you. Look!"

"Why, it's a horse-shoe, isn't it?" she said feebly, but with interest.

"Yes, and you know that means Good Luck." I brought it over to the bedside.

She smiled, but very weakly.

"It's too late," she said.

"Not a bit of it," I said. "The horse-shoe is a sign that it isn't too late."

"Perhaps it means I'm not going to—not going to be hurt—" She shut her eyes, and the tears crept out from under the lashes. "Jiffy, do you suppose people suffer much when they die?"

"Look," I said, my voice shaking a little.

"There are seven holes in this horse-shoe.

Isn't there some virtue in seven?" She opened her eyes.

"Yes," she said. "It's the sacred number. Don't you remember there were seven churches, and a book with seven seals, and a beast with seven heads—"

"No, no," I answered hurriedly, with a grotesque sense of the doubtful cheer in my having conjured up the red dragon of the Revelation. "No, I was thinking of the seven golden candlesticks and the seven stars—they were stars of good fortune, you remember?"

"Does it say so?"

"Why, don't you remember?"

"No, I'd forgotten."

"Come now, where shall I put this fine piece of luck?" I held out the horse-shoe.

"There's a nail in my ring-casket."

"Oh, we'll just set it on the mantelpiece. So!" I stood it against the clock.

"No, no, Jiffy," she protested feebly, half rising from the pillow. "Don't set it down so; it must be *nailed* up—but it's no use," she added, dropping back, "it's no use now."

"Yes, it is," I said. "Suppose we nail it over the door?" I went to the bureau, opened the heart-shaped silver box, and turned over

trinkets till I found a brass-headed nail. "What an odd place to keep nails!" I said to myself.

My wife was watching me.

"Isn't that a nice nail?" she said. "I kept it because I found it lying with its point towards me."

"Oh, that was a good sign," I said confidently, though what I meant I couldn't have told for my life. "Is there a hammer about?"

"No, Geoffrey. What is burning?"

"Burning? Nothing. Here, I'll use my boot." I took one of a heavy hob-nailed pair from the corner. I carried a chair to the threshold, mounted it, and began to nail the shoe in place.

"I can't see, Jiffy. Your head's in the way." I stepped down, hearing a cry of distress from my wife at the moment that I became aware of steps along the corridor. An instant, and Dorothy Lance stood framed in the doorway. The pallid electric light fell on

her beautiful face, and turned her white gown to silver.

"O Miss Lance!" I said, coming forward to move the chair. I was asking myself nervously why my wife had cried out at the apparition.

"The door was open and nobody about," Dorothy said to me, with a distant little smile, "so I ventured to find my way alone. But it's a complicated old place; I felt hopelessly lost till I heard your voices." She moved towards Milly's bed.

"This is Miss Lance," I said—"my wife."

"I heard you were not so well," the girl said, while I crossed the room and shut the door. Dorothy will take cold, I thought, with that thin shawl slipping away from her bare neck. "I—I hoped I might be of use in some way," the girl was saying when I came back. My wife held out a frail little hand. Dorothy hesitated the fraction of a second before she took it.

"Thank you," said my wife, "you are very kind. Jiffy dear, you've nailed it wrong side up." Her eyes were fixed above the door. Dorothy's and mine followed.

"Wrong side up?" I echoed.

"Yes, a horse-shoe is of no use like that. Turn it up like a U, or else all the luck will run out of the ends."

"Oh!" I said, with a swift glance at Dorothy standing at the bedside, stately and tall in her shining robes. I felt an ignoble shame that she should catch me at my childish work. But I mounted the chair, prized up the shoe, and reversed it. "That right?" I said, moving my head out of Milly's line of vision.

"Yes," she said, and I noticed that excitement or something had made her voice a little stronger.

With the great clumsy boot I hammered in the nail a second time, smiling grimly all to myself, to think of the impressive figure I was down and rubbed my fingers on my handker-chief. "Now nothing can go wrong with us," I said, trying to speak lightly, and looking at the two women. Never had I seen Dorothy so radiant and full of glowing life as she looked standing there beside the sick-bed of my wife. "She is like Diana," I said to myself. "She is the new moon shining in the night."

"Do you believe in luck?" my wife asked the white vision.

"No," said Dorothy, apparently without thinking. I gave her a warning look, and came and sat by the opposite side of the bed.

"Oh, don't you?" said Milly, a shade disappointed. "My husband used to laugh at my signs, but I realised to-night that in spite of all his sermons and scoffing he is superstitious himself, at least about one or two things."

"Oh!" said Dorothy, but so coldly I felt myself growing numb.

"Yes." My wife put out her hand to me. With a sense of pain and defiance, I took it and clasped it tight. Dorothy's eyes burnt me. "Yes," Milly repeated, "when my husband saw the new moon through glass he was as frightened and as silent as I was."

I lifted my eyes and met the quick inquiry of Dorothy's gaze full in my face. Had I let her believe it was the moon? Dorothy was asking silently. Had I? had I? I repeated to myself, and bent my head.

"He knew I saw it too," my wife went on in the rambling fashion of the sick, "and that I'd seen it for the third time. Darling, I'll never believe again you're not superstitious." My wife withdrew her hand out of my grasp, and laid it softly on my head. The word of endearment flashed into my quivering tissues like a knife. I felt Dorothy's flesh shrinking under it too. The thin little hand on my hair weighed like the stifling earth on a creature

buried alive. I lifted my head with a superhuman effort.

"You forget I told you it couldn't possibly be the moon."

"Yes, after we had sat there like stones for a long time, and the moon had had time to go under a cloud."

Something forced me to look again at Dorothy. All the rich colour had fled out of her face; she was staring at me with a kind of horror in her eyes. As I looked, she shook her head with a motion so slight that had my senses not been preternaturally quickened I could scarce have seen the action. But that "No, no, no," shut the door of hope on all the future. She had seen the spectre of Crime rise up between us.

My wife was talking on, but neither Dorothy nor I had heard a syllable. I passed my hand over my eyes. The room seemed full of haze. Suddenly the girl lifted her head with a resolute air, and said hurriedly:

"But, Mrs. Monroe, it—it's quite impossible that you could have seen the new moon. The night is cloudy or you'd be able soon to see it old and waning, as I did last night."

She pressed her hands against her breast and smiled in such a way I could have cried aloud.

"I think I'm the new moon, Mrs. Monroe. I hung my lamp up in the dusk and so misled you—both."

"You hung up a lamp in the chalet?" My wife half sat up, leaning on her elbow.

"Yes, a lantern in the gable window facing yours. There's a fête to-night in Nieder-Fichtenberg, and a torch-light dance. I wanted to illuminate a little to—to please some one. I had only one little lantern—" She stopped. Her voice seemed to fail her.

"But when my husband and I looked out we didn't see a gleam of light at the chalet."

"Ah, but that was because Donald-my cousin-had just come back and I had taken it

down. I'll tell you what I'll do—I'll go back and put the sign—the illumination up again, and you can see for yourself." She turned abruptly away and opened the door. A cloud of smoke rolled into the room over her head.

"Fire!" she said, starting back.

"No, surely not." I jumped up and ran into the hall. It was pitch-dark, and the thick black smoke was rolling up the staircase.

"We mustn't lose a moment," I said, rushing back into the room.

"I told my husband I smelt fire," Milly was saying.

Dorothy had brought some clothes to the bedside.

"No time to dress," I cried. I dragged a couple of blankets from under the coverlet and gave one to Dorothy. I threw the other round my wife. "We must get out of this as soon as possible. Don't wait for us," I said to Dorothy. "Cover up your head as you go downstairs, and

give the alarm." When I had lifted my wife in my arms Dorothy had melted into the thickening haze.

"Put your arms round my neck and hold tight," I said to my wife, and made for the door. It was all right till we got a few paces down the corridor, when suddenly I seemed to plunge into a sea of stifling smoke. It closed over our heads, blinding me utterly. As the stinging clouds poured into my lungs I reeled against the wall. I pressed my face against the blanket that I had thrown over Milly's head, and struggled for breath. I heard her muffled voice saying, "Hurry! hurry! we'll be burnt to death," and I stumbled on. "You've passed the turning to the stairs," she said the next moment.

I stopped and leaned against the wall. "Dor-

<sup>&</sup>quot;No," I said, "I think not."

<sup>&</sup>quot;I'm sure," she said. "You're going into the long wing."

othy! Dorothy!" I said to myself aimlessly, while I fought for breath. "Dorothy! Dorothy!" I kept repeating as I staggered on, feeling the smoke thicken into stinging wool, and the air grow hot as from a furnace. Suddenly it came over me that I had missed the way; I was lost in that network of corridors. Milly and I would die there like rats in a hole. "Well, Dorothy is safe," I said to myself, and nothing else seemed to matter. It was as if the smoke had entered my brain and made a twilight there.

"Geoffrey, why are you stopping?"
My arms loosened their hold.

"Milly, can you stand just a moment?" I said desperately, and I tumbled against the wall. She dropped helplessly at my feet.

"Geoffrey, Geoffrey, don't let me die here!"
Her terrified voice found me in the choking dark.

I steadied myself and was conscious of something coming against me. "Is it you, Milly?" I groped with my hands.

"No, it's I," said a different voice.

I trembled violently. My fingers were buried in Dorothy's thick, soft hair.

"You here!" I said, holding her head with both my hands.

"Yes," and she fell against my breast. "What is this at your feet between us?"

"Hush, hush! she has fainted, I think," and I drew away and stooped to lift my burden in my arms. But a new strength had come to me. I held my wife with one arm, and with my free hand drew Dorothy along in the stifling, hideous dark. We began to run again, and the motion revived my wife. We flung ourselves against sudden turns and angles, and groped, and ran, and stumbled, and ran on again. Milly kept crying:

"Save me, Geoffrey, save me! Oh, it's horrible to be burnt to death! Save me, save me! O God! O God!"

Dorothy spoke no word, only clung to my hand. At the end of that eternity that was only a few seconds, we reached a door.

"At last!" I heard Dorothy cry as she tried it. It was bolted, or else the latch caught.

"Force it open," my wife shrieked. "It's the wing staircase! Oh, I said we'd come too far! O God! O God! We'll never get out. O God! O God!" she kept moaning.

At last the door gave way and we started back, flying madly up the hall before the volume of smoke and flame that belched out upon us. The next thing I was conscious of was that my wife's hoarse crying was stilled, and that Dorothy was stumbling and falling in the dark. I tightened my hold and dragged her on, while the flames gained on us moment by moment. Suddenly Dorothy fell forward on her knees. Instead of struggling to her feet as she had done more than once before, she crouched there silent and motionless. When I opened my

hand hers dropped limp and nerveless out of my death-like grip.

"Dorothy," I cried, "we're near the main staircase. We're all right. Come, come!" I stooped with difficulty, cumbered as I was, and held my free hand out in the dark.

"Come, for God's sake, come!" Blind and only half conscious, I stooped lower and lower till I was down on one knee. My hand touched the soft fabric of her gown. She seemed to be lying on her back outstretched, relaxed like one in sleep.

"Come, come, I can't leave you to this horrible death!" I said. My fingers began to sting. Ah, that was it! Her clothes had caught fire. I had been too blinded with the smoke to see. The blanket round my wife was blazing too. I crushed the flame against me, deadening, killing it. "Dorothy," I cried, "my darling, my darling!" I felt her face. She seemed to kiss my hand. Her flesh was parched and hot. Did I

imagine it, or was her hair on fire? My wife stirred in my arms. I can save one, I thought, and my mind cleared, as they say a drowning man's does sometimes. In a lurid flash I saw the past, our long struggle with ourselves and circumstances—and I saw two possible futures. Let no one say I did not choose. Let no one say I did not clearly know what I took, and all that I was leaving in that hissing hell behind me. I staggered to my feet and plunged through the smoke. "I'll come back to you, dear. I'll come back to you," I cried, as I reeled down the wide staircase, and fell into a mob of screaming, crying people. Everything was dark for a few moments, and then I felt cold water dashing in my face. I opened my eyes. I looked up and saw the great flames flaring out of the windows like flags in a gale. I saw M'Kay lift my wife into another man's arms, and turn back to the burning house.

"No, no!" I shouted, leaping up from the ground.

M'Kay was running up the steps.

"Not you, damn you! I told her I'd come." I hurled him out of my way, and plunged back into the smoke. I heard cries echoing behind me, I heard the roar of fire on before, but it strung my nerves like a trumpet-blast in battle.

"I'm coming, dear!" I cried aloud, and I spread out my arms as if I thought to find her coming down the flaming stair to meet her lover. It went through my mind—her beautiful hair will be burnt if I don't hurry; her gown of "white samite, mystic, wonderful." Not her dear flesh, no—no! not the dear, white flesh—

"I'm coming! I've seen the light in the window. I'm coming!" I cried again. And then the banisters crumbled under my weight,

and I fell headlong over the side. But I remember distinctly, as I cut through the hot air, I seemed to be flying—flying upward. I spread out my arms—"I'm coming, dear—I'm coming!"

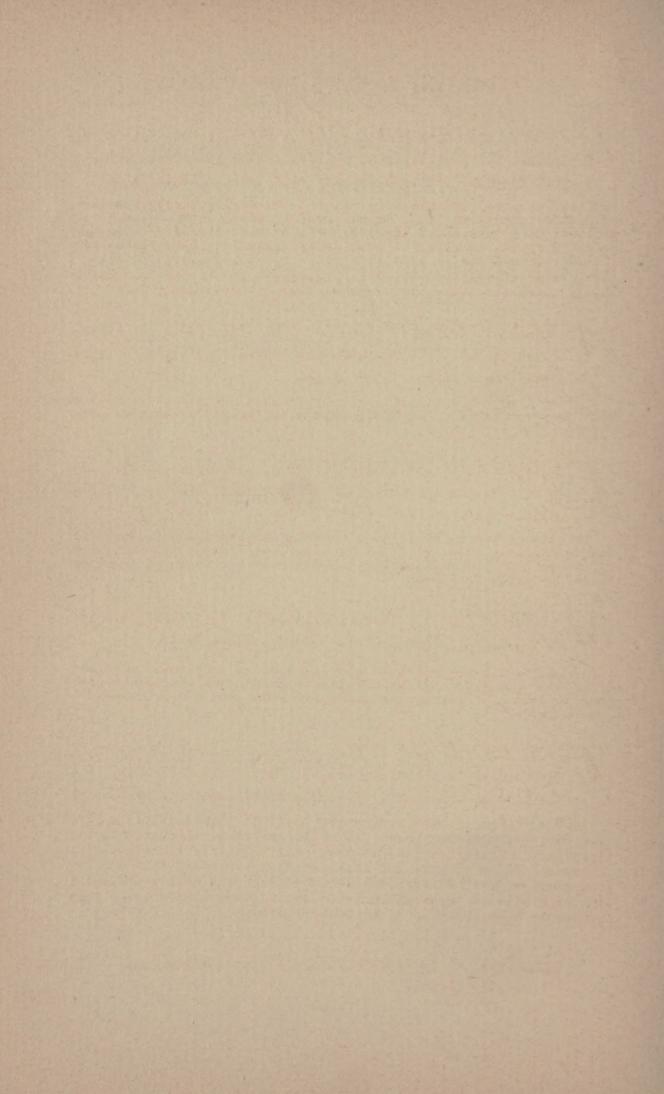
They got me out somehow, maimed and crippled; but she who had been Dorothy Lance was never seen of men after I had turned away and left her in the burning corridor.

My wife was quite unhurt. She lived for nearly a year after the night of the fire, and died of peritonitis only three months ago. The internal injury that I sustained has slowly sapped my strength, and I should know, even if I had not been frankly warned, that my time is very short. It is well, at least, that I am not mocked by health of body, when all that gave my life its savour and its meaning is lost out of the world. I thank the gods for this obscure

and baffling mischief, that manifests itself in such paroxysms of recurrent pain as have made my pen drop from my hand a score of times while I have been setting down these fragments of the past. But in the gathering gloom the thought of Dorothy Lance shines out like a star. Dear heart, you made life beautiful, and you make death calm! I am not sure, as I sit here, that I am not most glad of all that the great seal is set on our dear love. It is safe—safe as only things ended are. It is finished, quite, quite finished, dear, and laid away among the things that are not marked by stones nor mocked by man's memorials. I need not, in any dim antechamber of my brain, wonder: Will our love last? Shall I find you always fair? Will age and illness only draw us closer as the years go on? Or shall I, who wearied of my youth's allegiance, weary once again—or will you? Not even in dreams can these thorns wound me now. The dread I

used to feel of being haunted by your look of horror when you gazed into my eyes across the body of my wife—that, too, is gone. When I see your face, my dear, it smiles, and smiles, and understands—

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